



# HORIZONS

An Anthology of Short Stories  
(Class XI – English *Elective*)

*Editor*

M.S.KUSHWAHA



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्  
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

**First Edition**

July 2002

Asadha 1924

**PD 10T MGB**

ISBN 81-7450-070-7

© National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2002

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

- ❑ No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher
- ❑ This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise disposed of without the publisher's consent, in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published
- ❑ The correct price of this publication is the price printed on this page. Any revised price indicated by a rubber stamp or by a sticker or by any other means is incorrect and should be unacceptable

**OFFICES OF THE PUBLICATION DIVISION, NCERT**

NCERT Campus  
Sh Aurobindo Marg  
NEW DELHI 110 016  
179

108, 100 Feet Road, Hosdakere  
Halli Extension, Banashankari III Stage  
BANGALORE 560 085

Navjivan Trust Building  
P.O. Navjivan  
AHMEDABAD 380 014

CWC Campus  
32, B.T. Road, Sukchar  
24 PARGANAS 743

**Publication Team**

*Editor* M.G. BHAGAT  
*Production* PRAMOD RAWAT  
RAJENDER CHAUHAN  
*Illustrations* SEEMA JABIN HUSAIN

**Cover and Layout**

K.K. CHADHA

**Rs 31.00**

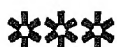
DLDI, NCERT

823

HOR (NAT) F22573

*Printed on 70 GSM paper with NCERT watermark*

Published at the Publication Department by the Secretary, National Council of Educational Research and Training, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi 110 016, and printed at Narian Printers & Binders, D-6, Sector 63 Noida.



## Foreword

ELECTIVE ENGLISH is meant for students opting to pursue a challenging course in English language and literature. This will prepare them for a specialised study of English at the collegiate level or for taking up a career as teachers of English. The *National Curriculum Framework for School Education – 2000* (NCFSE) highlights the need for developing among students sensitivity to the creative and imaginative use of English. Through the present anthology, an attempt has been made to achieve these objectives by exposing the readers to the variety of English short stories including some written by Indian authors.

*Horizons* contains several short stories with varying themes that range from societal problems to psychological conflicts to personal relationship, and touch different horizons of human life. All these short stories in this anthology call for stimulating discussion in the classroom. This will generate a taste for reading stories with pleasure and help the students understand the short story as a genre and appreciate human characters and their interactions in different situations. The teachers' role in this context is to guide the students to appreciate and enjoy short stories in English on their own.

I am grateful to all the experts and teachers of the Review Workshop and my colleagues in the Department of Education in Social Sciences and Humanities who helped in the development and finalisation of the manuscript of this book. The NCERT sincerely hopes that this book will meet the overall learning needs of the students of Class XI. The comments and suggestions of teachers and students on any aspect of this book are welcome. This would enable us to improve the next edition.

J.S. RAJPUT  
*Director*

New Delhi  
June 2002

National Council of Educational  
Research and Training



## GANDHIJI'S TALISMAN

“I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test :

Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it ? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny ? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions ?

Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.”

*M.K. Gandhi*



## Note to the Teacher

*Horizons* is based on the new syllabus in English, which was prepared in consonance with the spirit of the new Curriculum Framework. This is a part of the package designed for the students who have learnt English for 10 years at the school level and have opted for Elective English. The main objectives of this book are to:

- expose the students to rich literary texts of world literature as well that of Indian writers;
- develop sensitivity to the imaginative and creative usage of language and give them a taste for reading with discernment;
- enable the learner to work towards self-dependence in reading; and
- help students understand the short story as a genre.

The book provides interesting and thought provoking materials on themes ranging from the joys and sorrows of everyday life to the deep psychological conflicts and meaning of human existence. After each story a set of reading comprehension questions are given to assist the growth of those skills that comprise reading for generating thinking and critical understanding of life and people. Some questions call for critical comprehension, which is the first step to literary interpretation, inference, and evaluation. The activities under 'Discussion' are meant to enrich the possibilities of making the learner sensitive to the sets of characters, their moods and attitudes. The exercises under 'Appreciation' will make the learner go deep into the finer points of events and the typical behaviour of the characters. They will further draw the students' attention as to how a single aspect of personality undergoes changes or is revealed as a result of the conflict.

A select glossary at the end of each story is an aid to understanding. They explain allusions and unfamiliar terms. But many words are not glossed so as to make the learners look up the dictionary for appropriate meanings and usage, and increase their passive vocabulary. It is hoped that this book will meet the academic needs of the students. The objectives will be achieved if the students enjoy and appreciate the stories, characters and events; and experience the variety in human life.

# Participants of the Review Workshop

Dr V. K. Bajpai  
*Former Reader in English*  
NCERT  
4/3 NIE Campus, New Delhi

J. K. Gangal  
*Former Education Officer*  
Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan  
196, Ramakrishna Vihar  
Plot 29, IP Extension  
Patparganj, Delhi

Beulah Jeyasilee  
*Reader in English*  
Mother Teresa  
Women's University  
Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu

P. Varadarajan  
*Principal, DPS*  
Rourkela, Orissa

Syed Iqbal Hasan  
*PGT, English*  
Ramjas Sr. Secondary School  
Daryaganj, New Delhi

Meemansa Dikshit  
*PGT, English*  
National School for the Blind  
Lodhi Road, New Delhi

Hema Mittal  
*PGT, English*  
JF1/1D, Khirki Ext.,  
Gupta Colony, Malviya Nagar  
New Delhi

Sangeeta Raghuvansi  
*PGT, English*  
Kendriya Vidyalaya  
JNU  
New Delhi

Jyothi Ramachandran  
*PGT, English*  
Bombay Utkal English High School  
Kurla, Mumbai

## **NCERT Faculty, DESSH**

Nasiruddin Khan  
*Reader in English*

Dr Sandhya R. Sahoo  
*Reader in English*

Kirti Kapur  
*Lecturer in English*

Prof. Rajendra Dixit (**Coordinator**)  
*Head of the Department*



# ☼ Contents ☼

	<i>Foreword</i>	<i>iii</i>
	<i>Note to the Teacher</i>	<i>v</i>
I.	The Home-Coming	RABINDRANATH TAGORE 1
II.	The Luncheon	WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM 11
III.	A Pair of Mustachios	MULK RAJ ANAND 19
IV.	The Rocking-Horse Winner	D.H. LAWRENCE 29
V.	What Men Live By	LEO TOLSTOY 50
VI.	Sparrows	K.A. ABBAS 76
VII.	The Lament	ANTON CHEKHOV 85
VIII.	A Case of Identity	ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE 93
IX.	An Old Man Speaks	SILABHADRA 116
X.	After Bhopal	HARSH MANDER 129



# CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

## Chapter IVA

### Fundamental Duties of Citizens

#### ARTICLE 51A

Fundamental Duties – It shall be the duty of every citizen of India —

- (a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;
- (b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;
- (c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;
- (d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;
- (e) To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;
- (f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;
- (g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, wild life and to have compassion for living creatures,
- (h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;
- (i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;
- (j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement.

---

## The Home-Coming



RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861-1941) is the only Indian writer to have won the Nobel Prize in Literature. He wrote primarily in Bengali language, but his original English writings are by no means negligible. They have been brought out in three volumes by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. 'Gitanjali' is a collection of his own English renderings of 103 lyrics from his Bengali work bearing the same title.

*Tagore's was a many splendoured personality. He was a thinker, educationist, poet, playwright, storywriter, essayist, and artist – all rolled into one, and much besides.*

*Tagore's stories are marked by tenderness and an undercurrent of deep pathos. The present story, which rotates round an adolescent character, is typical of them.*

PHATIK CHAKRAVORTI was ringleader among the boys of the village. A new mischief got into his head. There was a heavy log lying on the mud-flat of the river waiting to be shaped into a mast for a boat. He decided that they should all work together to shift the log by main force from its place and roll it away. The owner of the log would be angry and surprised, and they would all enjoy the fun. Every one seconded the proposal, and it was carried unanimously.

But just as the fun was about to begin, Makhan, Phatik's younger brother, sauntered up, and sat down on the log in front of them all without a word. The boys were puzzled for a moment. He was pushed, rather timidly, by one of the boys and told to get up : but he remained quite unconcerned. He appeared like a young philosopher meditating on the facility of games. Phatik was furious. "Makhan," he cried, "if you don't get down this minute, I'll thrash you!"

Makhan only moved to a more comfortable position.

Now, if Phatik was to keep his regal dignity before the public, it was clear he ought to carry out his threat. But his courage failed him at the crisis. His fertile brain, however, rapidly seized upon a new manoeuvre which would discomfit his brother and afford his followers an added amusement. He gave the word of command to roll the log and Makhan over together. Makhan heard the order, and made it a point of honour to stick on. But he overlooked the fact, like those who attempt earthly fame in other matters, that there was peril in it.

The boys began to heave at the log with all their might, calling out, "One, two, three, go." At the word 'go' the log went; and with it went Makhan's philosophy, glory and all.

All the other boys shouted themselves hoarse with delight. But Phatik was a little frightened. He knew what was coming. And, sure enough, Makhan rose from Mother Earth blind as Fate and screaming like the Furies. He rushed at Phatik and scratched his face and beat him and kicked him, and then went crying home. The first act of the drama was over.

Phatik wiped his face, and sat down on the edge of a sunken barge on the river bank, and began to chew a piece of grass. A boat came up to the landing, and a middle-aged man, with grey hair and dark moustache, stepped on shore. He saw the boy sitting there doing nothing, and asked him where the Chakravortis lived. Phatik went on chewing the grass, and said: "Over there," but it was quite impossible to tell where he pointed. The stranger asked him again. He swung his legs to and fro on the side of the barge, and said: "Go and find out," and continued to chew the grass as before.

But now a servant came down from the house, and told Phatik his mother wanted him. Phatik refused to move. But the servant was the master on this occasion. He took Phatik up roughly, and carried him, kicking and struggling in impotent rage.

When Phatik came into the house, his mother saw him. She called out angrily: "So you have been hitting Makhan again?"

Phatik answered indignantly: "No, I haven't; who told you that?"

His mother shouted: "Don't tell lies! You have."

Phatik said suddenly: "I tell you, I haven't. You ask Makhan!" But Makhan thought it best to stick to his previous statement. He said: "Yes, mother. Phatik did hit me."

Phatik's patience was already exhausted. He could not bear this injustice. He rushed at Makhan and hammered him with blows: "Take that," he cried, "and that, and that, for telling lies."

His mother took Makhan's side in a moment, and pulled Phatik away, beating him with her hands. When Phatik pushed her aside, she shouted out: "What! You little villain! Would you hit your own mother!"

It was just at this critical juncture that the grey-haired stranger arrived. He asked what was the matter. Phatik looked sheepish and ashamed.

But when his mother stepped back and looked at the stranger, her anger was changed to surprise. For she recognised her brother, and cried: "Why, Dada! Where have you come from?"

As she said these words, she bowed to the ground and touched his feet. Her brother had gone away soon after she had married, and he had started business in Bombay<sup>1</sup>. His sister had lost her husband while he was in Bombay. Bishamber had now come back to Calcutta<sup>2</sup>, and had at once made enquiries about his sister. He had then hastened to see her as soon as he found out where she was.

The next few days were full of rejoicing. The brother asked about the education of the two boys. He was told by his sister that Phatik was a perpetual nuisance. He was

---

1. Bombay is now renamed as Mumbai.

2. Calcutta is now renamed as Kolkata.

lazy, disobedient, and wild. But Makhan was as good as gold, as quiet as a lamb, and very fond of reading. Bishamber kindly offered to take Phatik off his sister's hands, and educate him with his own children in Calcutta. The widowed mother readily agreed. When his uncle asked Phatik if he would like to go to Calcutta with him, his joy knew no bounds, and he said: "Oh, yes, uncle!" in a way that made it quite clear that he meant it.

It was an immense relief to the mother to get rid of Phatik. She had a prejudice against the boy, and no love was lost between the two brothers. She was in daily fear that he would either drown Makhan some day in the river, or break his head in a fight, or run him into some danger or other. At the same time she was somewhat distressed to see Phatik's extreme eagerness to get away.

Phatik, as soon as all was settled, kept asking his uncle every minute when they were to start. He was on pins and needles all the day long with excitement, and lay awake most of the night. He bequeathed to Makhan, in perpetuity, his fishing-rod, his big kite, and his marbles. Indeed, at this time of departure his generosity towards Makhan was unbounded.

When they reached Calcutta, Phatik made the acquaintance of his aunt for the first time. She was by no means pleased with this unnecessary addition to her family. She found her own three boys quite enough to manage without taking any one else. And to bring a village lad of fourteen into their midst was terribly upsetting. Bishamber should really have thought twice before committing such an indiscretion.

In this world of human affairs there is no worse nuisance than a boy at the age of fourteen. He is neither ornamental nor useful. It is impossible to shower affection on him as on a little boy; and he is always getting in the way. If he talks with a childish lisp he is called a baby, and if he answers in a grown-up way he is called impertinent. In fact, any talk at all from him is resented. Then he is at the unattractive, growing age. He grows out

of his clothes with indecent haste; his voice grows hoarse and breaks and quavers; his face grows suddenly angular and unsightly. It is easy to excuse the shortcomings of early childhood, but it is hard to tolerate even unavoidable lapses in a boy of fourteen. The lad himself becomes painfully self-conscious. When he talks with elderly people he is either unduly forward, or else so unduly shy that he appears ashamed of his very existence.

Yet it is at this very age when in his heart of hearts a young lad most craves for recognition and love; and he becomes the devoted slave of any one who shows him consideration. But none dare openly love him, for that would be regarded as undue indulgence, and therefore bad for the boy. So what, with scolding and chiding, he becomes very much like a stray dog that has lost his master.

For a boy of fourteen his own home is the only Paradise. To live in a strange house with strange people is little short of torture, while the height of bliss is to receive the kind looks of women, and never to be slighted by them.

It was anguish to Phatik to be the unwelcome guest in his aunt's house, despised by this elderly woman, and slighted on every occasion. If she ever asked him to do anything for her, he would be so overjoyed that he would overdo it; and then she would tell him not to be so stupid, but to get on with his lessons.

The cramped atmosphere of neglect in his aunt's house oppressed Phatik so much that he felt that he could hardly breathe. He wanted to go out into the open country and fill his lungs and breathe freely. But there was no open country to go to. Surrounded on all sides by Calcutta houses and walls, he would dream night after night of his village home, and long to be back there. He remembered the glorious meadow where he used to fly his kite all day long; the broad river-banks where he would wander about the livelong day singing and shouting for joy; the narrow brook where he could go and dive and swim at any time he liked. He thought of his band of boy companions over whom he was despot; and, above all, the memory of that tyrant

mother of his, who had such a prejudice against him, occupied him day and night. A kind of physical love like that of animals; a longing to be in the presence of the one who is loved; an inexpressible wistfulness during absence; a silent cry of the inmost heart for the mother, like the lowing of a calf in the twilight; this love, which was almost an animal instinct, agitated the shy, nervous, lean, uncouth and ugly boy. No one could understand it, but it preyed upon his mind continually.

There was no more backward boy in the whole school than Phatik. He gaped and remained silent when the teacher asked him a question, and like an overladen ass patiently suffered all the blows that came down on his back. When other boys were out at play, he stood wistfully by the window and gazed at the roofs of the distant houses. And if by chance he espied children playing on the open terrace of any roof, his heart would ache with longing.

One day he summoned up all his courage, and asked his uncle: "Uncle, when can I go home?"

His uncle answered: "Wait till the holidays come."

But the holidays would not come till November, and there was a long time still to wait.

One day Phatik lost his lesson-book. Even with the help of books he had found it very difficult indeed to prepare his lesson. Now it was impossible. Day after day the teacher would cane him mercilessly. His condition became so abjectly miserable that even his cousins were ashamed to own him. They began to jeer and insult him more than the other boys. He went to his aunt at last, and told her that he had lost his book.

His aunt pursed her lips in contempt, and said: "You great clumsy, country lout. How can I afford, with all my family, to buy you new books five times a month?"

That night, on his way back from school, Phatik had a bad headache with a fit of shivering. He felt he was going to have an attack of Malarial fever. His one great fear was that he would be a nuisance to his aunt.

The next morning Phatik was nowhere to be seen. All searches in the neighbourhood proved futile. The rain had been pouring in torrents all night, and those who went out in search of the boy got drenched through to the skin. At last Bishamber asked help from the police.

At the end of the day a police van stopped at the door before the house. It was still raining and the streets were all flooded. Two constables brought out Phatik in their arms and placed him before Bishamber. He was wet through from head to foot, muddy all over, his face and eyes flushed red with fever, and his limbs all-trembling. Bishamber carried him in his arms, and took him into the inner apartments. When his wife saw him, she exclaimed: "What a heap of trouble this boy has given us. Hadn't you better send him home!"

Phatik heard her words, and sobbed aloud: "Uncle, I was just going home; but they dragged me back again."

The fever rose very high, and all that night the boy was delirious. Bishamber brought in a doctor. Phatik opened his eyes flushed with fever, and looked up to the ceiling, and said vacantly: "Uncle, have the holidays come yet? May I go home?"

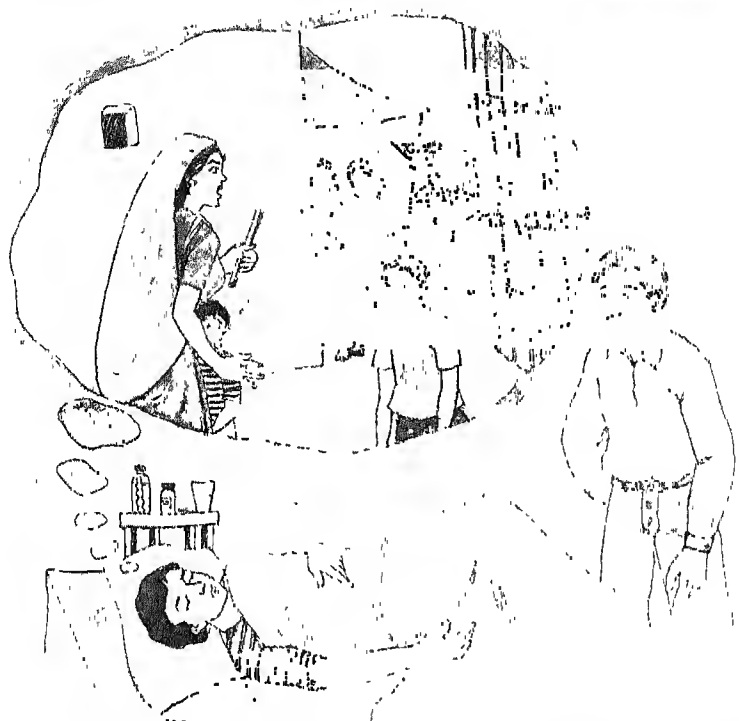
Bishamber wiped the tears from his own eyes, and took Phatik's lean and burning hands in his own, and sat by him through the night. The boy began again to mutter. At last his voice became excited: "Mother," he cried, "don't beat me like that! Mother! I am telling the truth!"

The next day Phatik became conscious for a short time. He turned his eyes about the room, as if expecting some one to come. At last, with an air of disappointment, his head sank back on the pillow. He turned his face to the wall with a deep sigh.

Bishamber knew his thoughts, and bending down his head, whispered: "Phatik, I have sent for your mother."

The day went by. The doctor said in a troubled voice that the boy's condition was very critical.

Phatik began to cry out: "By the mark! — three fathoms. By the mark — four fathoms. By the mark ——" He had



heard the sailor on the river-steamer calling out the mark on the plumb-line. Now he was himself plumbing an unfathomable sea.

Later in the day Phatik's mother burst into the room like a whirlwind, and began to toss from side to side and moan and cry in a loud voice.

Bishamber tried to calm her agitation, but she flung herself on the bed, and cried: "Phatik, my darling, my darling."

Phatik stopped his restless movements for a moment. His hands ceased beating up and down. He said: "Eh?"

The mother cried again: "Phatik, my darling, my darling."

Phatik very slowly turned his head and, without seeing anybody, said: "Mother, the holidays have come."

**RABINDRANATH TAGORE**

**GLOSSARY**

**sauntered up** — walked in a leisurely way

**manoeuvre** — a skilful move

**heave** — pull

**furies** — three snake-haired goddesses, mentioned in Greek mythology, who pursued unpunished criminals

**barge** — a large low boat with a flat bottom, used mainly for carrying heavy goods on a river

**no love was lost** — a mild way of saying that they disliked each other

**on pins** — exceedingly restless

**bequeathed** — left (property or money) to a person by will

**in perpetuity** — a legal term, meaning 'for all time'

**by the mark** — when a shallow place comes at sea or on a great river, one of sailors throws a piece of lead, with a string tied to it, into the water, and then looks at the mark on the string. He calls out that the depth is 'three' or 'four' fathoms according to the mark.

**fathom** — a measure (6 feet or 1.8 metres) of the depth of water

**COMPREHENSION**

1. What prank did Phatik want to play, and why?
2. Why did Phatik tell his friends to go ahead with the plan? Does this reveal anything about his frame of mind?
3. What is Makhan compared with, and why?
4. Phatik did not get the thrill that he had expected after the mischief. Why?
5. How does Phatik respond to the man who asks about the direction of the residence of Chakravortis? What does it reveal about his personality?
6. Do you think that the mother was prejudiced against Phatik? Give reasons for your answer.
7. Why was Phatik so generous towards Makhan at the time of his departure?
8. What kind of treatment did Phatik receive from his aunt and cousins in Calcutta, and what did it lead to?
9. Why was he scared of falling ill? What was his main worry?
10. Why does the memory of his mother, whom he considered a tyrant, continue occupying his mind day and night?

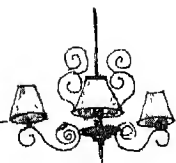
**APPRECIATION**

1. Into how many parts would you like to divide the story? Justify the division.
2. Why does the author call the Earth 'Mother' and Fate 'Blind'?
3. Explain the phrase, 'blind as Fate and screaming like the Furies.'
4. What do you learn from the story about the psychology of an adolescent boy?
5. What is the significance of the title, 'The Home-Coming'?
6. What is implied by Phatik's statement, 'Mother! I am telling the truth?'
7. Why does Phatik say, 'Mother, the holidays have come?'

**DISCUSSION**

1. 'In this world of human affairs there is no worse nuisance than a boy at the age of fourteen.' Discuss.
2. What do you think finally happens to Phatik at the end of the story?
3. The behaviour of Phatik's aunt towards him was natural. Discuss.





---

## The Luncheon

*WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM (1874-1965) is a distinguished British author. He was born in Paris, and his childhood was spent in a French-speaking society. After the death of his father, he returned to England at the age of 10. He studied at Heidelberg and at St. Thomas's Hospital, London, and qualified as a doctor. But he preferred writing to practising medicine.*

*During his long career as a writer, Maugham produced a large number of novels, plays and short stories. Some of his best novels include Of Human Bondage, The Moon and Sixpence and Cakes and Ale.*

*Maugham has an amazing skill for revealing, with a few touches, a situation and the essentials of a character, and his stories are told with a lucidity and an economy of words which are the marks of a supreme craftsman.*

I CAUGHT sight of her at the play, and in answer to her beckoning I went over during the interval and sat down beside her. It was long since I had last seen her, and if someone had not mentioned her name I hardly think I would have recognized her. She addressed me brightly.

'Well, it's many years since we first met. How time does fly! We're none of us getting any younger. Do you remember the first time I saw you? You asked me to luncheon.'

Did I remember?

It was twenty years ago and I was living in Paris. I had a tiny apartment in the Latin quarter overlooking a cemetery and I was earning barely enough money to keep the body and soul together. She had read a book of mine and had written to me about it. I answered, thanking

her, and presently I received from her another letter saying that she was passing through Paris and would like to have a chat with me; but her time was limited and the only free moment she had was on the following Thursday; she was spending the morning at the Luxembourg and would I give her a little luncheon at Foyot's afterwards? Foyot's is a restaurant at which the French senators eat, and it was so far beyond my means that I had never even thought of going there. But I was flattered, and I was too young to have learned to say no to a woman. Few men, I may add, learn this until they are too old to make it of any consequence to a woman what they say. I had eighty francs (gold francs) to last me the rest of the month, and a modest luncheon should not cost more than fifteen. If I cut out coffee for the next two weeks I could manage well enough.

I answered that I would meet my friend—by correspondence—at Foyot's on Thursday at half-past twelve. She was not so young as I expected and in appearance imposing rather than attractive. She was in fact a woman of forty (a charming age, but not one that excites a sudden and devastating passion at first sight), and she gave me the impression of having more teeth, white and large and even, that were necessary for any practical purpose. She was talkative, but since she seemed inclined to talk about me I was prepared to be an attentive listener.

I was startled when the bill of fare was brought, for the prices were a great deal higher than I had anticipated. But she reassured me.

'I never eat anything for luncheon.' She said.

'Oh, don't say that!' I answered generously.

'I never eat more than one thing. I think people eat far too much nowadays. A little fish, perhaps. I wonder if they have any salmon.'

Well, it was early in the year for salmon and it was not on the bill of fare, but I asked the waiter if there was any. Yes, a beautiful salmon had just come in, it was the

first they had had. I ordered it for my guest. The waiter asked her if she would have something while it was being cooked.

'No,' she answered, 'I never eat more than one thing. Unless you have a little caviare. I never mind caviare.'

My heart sank a little. I knew I could not afford caviare, but I could not very well tell her that. I told the waiter by all means to bring caviare. For myself I chose the cheapest dish on the menu and that was a mutton chop.

'I think you are unwise to eat meat,' she said. 'I don't know how you can expect to work after eating heavy things like chops. I don't believe in overloading my stomach.'

Then came the question of drink.

'I never drink anything for luncheon,' she said.

'Neither do I,' I answered promptly.

'Except white wine,' she proceeded as though I had not spoken.

'These French white wines are so light. They're wonderful for the digestion.'

'What would you like?' I asked, hospitable still, but not exactly effusive.

She gave me a bright and amicable flash of her white teeth.

'My doctor won't let me drink anything but Champagne.'

I fancy I turned a trifle pale. I ordered half a bottle. I mentioned casually that my doctor had absolutely forbidden me to drink Champagne.

'What are you going to drink, then?'

'Water.'

She ate the caviare and she ate the salmon. She talked gaily of art and literature and music. But I wondered what the bill would come to. When my mutton chop arrived she took me quite seriously to task.

'I see that you're in the habit of eating a heavy luncheon. I'm sure it's a mistake. Why don't you follow my example and just eat one thing? I'm sure you'd feel ever so much better for it.'

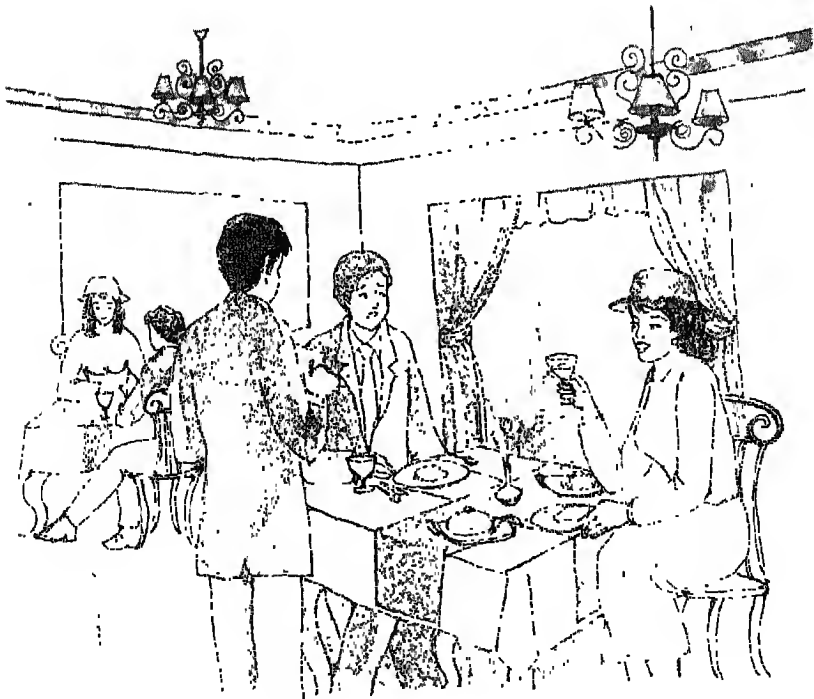
'I am only going to eat one thing,' I said, as the waiter came again with the bill of fare.

She waved him aside with an airy gesture.

'No, no, I never eat anything for luncheon. Just a bite, I never want more than that, and I eat that more as an excuse for conversation than anything else. I couldn't possibly eat anything more—unless they had some of those giant asparagus. I should be sorry to leave Paris without having some of them.'

My heart sank. I had seen them in the shops, and I knew that they were horribly expensive. My mouth had often watered at the sight of them.

'Madame wants to know if you have any of those giant asparagus,' I asked the waiter.



I tried with all my might to will him to say no. A happy smile spread over his broad, priest-like face, and he assured me that they had some so large, so splendid, so tender, that it was a marvel.

'I'm not in the least hungry,' my guest sighed, 'but if you insist I don't mind having some asparagus.'

I ordered them.

'Aren't you going to have any?'

'No, I never eat asparagus.'

'I know there are people who don't like them. The fact is, you ruin your palate by all the meat you eat.'

We waited for the asparagus to be cooked. Panic seized me. It was not a question now how much money I should have left over for the rest of the month, but whether I had enough to pay the bill. It would be mortifying to find myself ten francs short and be obliged to borrow from my guest. I could not bring myself to do that. I knew exactly how much I had, and if the bill came to more I made up my mind that I would put my hand in my pocket and with a dramatic cry start up and say it had been picked. Of course, it would be awkward if she had not money enough either to pay the bill. Then the only thing would be to leave my watch and say I would come back and pay later.

The asparagus appeared. They were enormous, succulent, and appetizing. The smell of the melted butter tickled my nostrils as the nostrils of Johovah were tickled by the burned offerings of the virtuous Semites. I watched the abandoned woman thrust them down her throat in large voluptuous mouthfuls, and in my polite way I discoursed on the condition of the drama in the Balkans. At last she finished.

'Coffee,' I said.

'Yes, just an ice-cream and coffee,' she answered.

I was past caring now, so I ordered coffee for myself and ice-cream and coffee for her.

'You know, there's one thing I thoroughly believe in,' she said, as she ate the ice-cream. 'One should always get up from a meal feeling one could eat a little more.'

'Are you still hungry?' I asked faintly.

'Oh, no, I'm not hungry; you see, I don't eat luncheon. I have a cup of coffee in the morning and then dinner, but I never eat more than one thing for luncheon. I was speaking for you.'

'Oh, I see!'

Then a terrible thing happened. While we were waiting for the coffee, the headwaiter, with an ingratiating smile on his false face, came up to us bearing a large basket full of huge peaches. They had the blush of an innocent girl; they had the rich tone of an Italian landscape. But surely peaches were not in season then? Lord knew what they cost. I knew too—a little later, for my guest, going on with her conversation, absentmindedly took one.

'You see, you've filled your stomach with a lot of meat'—my one miserable little chop—'and you can't eat any more. But I've just had a snack and I shall enjoy a peach.'

The bill came, and when I paid it I found that I had only enough for a quite inadequate tip. Her eyes rested for an instant on the three francs I left for the waiter, and I knew that she thought me mean. But when I walked out of the restaurant I had the whole month before me and not a penny in my pocket.

'Follow my example,' she said as we shook hands, 'and never eat more than one thing for luncheon.'

'I'll do better than that,' I retorted. 'I'll eat nothing for dinner tonight.'

'Humorist!' she cried gaily, jumping into a cab. 'You're quite a humorist!'

But I have had my revenge at last. I do not believe that I am a vindictive man, but when the immortal gods take a hand in the matter it is pardonable to observe the result with complacency. Today she weighs twenty-one stone.

**W.S. MAUGHAM**

**GLOSSARY**

**beckoning** — from 'beckon', to make a sign with a finger asking a person to come

**the Latin quarters** — the poorer part of Paris

**Luxembourg** — a city near Paris, in France

**Foyot's** — a very expensive restaurant

**bill of fare** — menu with the price list

**salmon** — a type of large fish, valued for its taste

**caviare** — delicacy, very costly

**effusive** — showing much or too much emotion

**Champagne** — a type of costly French wine, drunk on special occasions

**asparagus** — a kind of rare vegetable, a side dish, very expensive

**palate** — sense of taste

**mortifying** — causing embarrassment

**succulent** — juicy

**ingratiating** — wanting to get into favour

**complacency** — self-satisfaction

**stone** — a stone is equal to 14 pounds (6.35 kilograms)

**COMPREHENSION**

1. Why was the author not able to say 'no' to the lady's proposition?
2. What were the several dishes that the lady ordered one after another?
3. What did the author eat? What was the reason for selecting the dish?
4. What were the lady's comments on his dish?
5. 'Then a terrible thing happened! What was the 'terrible thing,' and why does the author describe it as 'terrible'?
6. Why was the author worried about paying the bill?
7. Why did the lady call the author a 'humorist'? What did she mean by it?
8. Why did the author have a feeling of complacency at the end of the story?

**APPRECIATION**

1. The expression, 'I never eat more than one thing', is repeated several times in the story. What purpose does it serve?
2. Attempt a character-sketch of the lady.

3. How does the author create humour in the story?

**Discussion**

1. Describe an embarrassing experience (real or imaginary) that you have had.
2. Do you find the story convincing? Give reasons *for* or *against* it.





---

## A Pair of Mustachios

MULK RAJ ANAND (born 1905) is one of the most celebrated Indian novelists writing in English. He was born in Peshawar, and educated at the universities of Lahore, London and Cambridge.

*His novels include The Untouchable, Coolie, The Sword and the Sickle, Private Life of an Indian Prince, Seven Summers and Morning Face. He has also published a number of short stories which reveal a lively sense of humour, a keen eye for the pretensions of the people, and a feeling of warm compassion.*

THERE ARE various kinds of mustachios worn in my country to mark the boundaries between the various classes of people. Outsiders may think it stupid to lay down, or rather to raise, lines of demarcation of this kind, but we are notorious in the whole world for sticking to our queer old conventions, prides and prejudices, even as the Chinese or the Americans, or for that matter, the English... And, at any rate, some people may think it easier and more convenient to wear permanent boundary-lines like mustachios, which only need a smear of grease to keep them bright and shiny, rather than to wear frock coats, striped trousers and top hats, which constantly need to be laundered and dry-cleaned, and the maintenance of which is already leading to the bankruptcy of the European ruling classes. With them clothes make the man, but to us mustachios make the man. So we prefer the various styles of mustachios to mark the differences between the classes.

And very unique and poetical symbols they are too. For instance, there is the famous lion moustache, the fearsome upstanding symbol of that great order of

resplendent Rajas, Maharajas, Nababs and English army generals who are so well known for their devotion to the King Emperor. Then there is the tiger moustache, the uncanny, several-pointed moustache worn by the unbending, unchanging survivals from the ranks of the feudal gentry who have nothing left but the pride in their greatness and a few mementoes of past glory, scrolls of honour, granted by the former Emperors, a few gold trinkets, heirlooms, and bits of land. Next there is the goat moustache—a rather unsure brand, worn by the nouveau riche, the new commercial bourgeoisie and the shopkeeper class who somehow don't belong—an indifferent, thin little line of a moustache, worn so that its tips can be turned up or down as the occasion demands—a show of power to some coolie or humility to a prosperous client. There is the Charlie Chaplin moustache worn by the lower middle class, by clerks and professional men, a kind of half-and-half affair, deliberately designed as a compromise between the traditional full moustache and the clean-shaven Curzon cut of the Sahibs like them to keep mustachios at all. There is the sheep moustache of the coolies and the lower orders, the mouse moustache of the peasants, and so on.



In fact, there are endless styles of mustachios, all appropriate to the wearers and indicative of the various orders, as rigorously adhered to as if they had all been patented by the Government of India or had been sanctioned by special appointment with His Majesty the King or Her Majesty the Queen. And any poaching on the style of one class by members of another is resented, and the rising ratio of murders in my country is interpreted by certain authorities as being indicative of the increasing jealousy with which each class is guarding its rights and privileges in regard to the mark of the mustachio.

Of course, the analysis of the expert is rather too abstract, and not all the murders can be traced to this cause, but certainly it is true that the preferences of the people in regard to their mustachios are causing a lot of trouble in our parts.

For instance, there was a rumpus in my own village the other day about a pair of mustachios.

It so happened that Seth Ramanand, the grocer and moneylender, who had been doing well out of the recent fall in the price of wheat by buying up whole crops cheap from the hard-pressed peasants and then selling grain at higher prices, took it into his head to twist the goat moustache, integral to his order and position in society, at the tips, so that it looked nearly like a tiger moustache.

Nobody seemed to mind very much, because most of the mouse-moustached peasants in our village are beholden to the local moneylender, either because they owe him interest on a loan, or an instalment on a mortgage of jewellery or land. Besides, the Seth had been careful enough to twist his moustache so that it seemed nearly though not quite like a tiger moustache.

But there lives in the vicinity of our village, in an old, dilapidated Moghul style house; a Mussulman named Khan Azam Khan, who claims descent from an ancient Afghan family whose heads were noblemen and councillors in the Court of the Great Moghuls. Khan Azam Khan, a tall, middle-aged man, is a handsome and dignified person, and he wears a tiger moustache and remains adorned with the faded remnants of a gold-brocaded waistcoat, though he hasn't even a patch of land left.

Some people, notably the landlord of our village and the moneylender, maliciously say that he is an impostor, and that all his talk about his blue blood is merely the bluff of a rascal. Others, like the priest of the temple, concede that his ancestors were certainly attached to the Court of the Great Moghuls, but as sweepers. The landlord, the moneylender and the priest are manifestly jealous of anyone's long ancestry, however, because they have all

risen from nothing, and it is obvious from the stately ruins around Khan Azam Khan what grace was once his and his forefathers. Only Khan Azam Khan's pride is greatly in excess of his present possessions, and he is inordinately jealous of his old privileges and rather foolish and headstrong in safeguarding every sacred brick of his tottering house against vandalism.

Khan Azam Khan happened to go to the moneylender's shop to pawn his wife's gold nose-ring one morning and he noticed the upturning tendency of the hair on Ramanand's upper lip which made the moneylender's goat moustache look almost like his own tiger moustache.

'Since when have the lentil-eating shopkeepers become noblemen?' he asked sourly.

'I don't know what you mean, Khan', Ramanand answered.

'You know what I mean, seed of a donkey!' said the Khan. Look at the way you have turned the tips of your moustache upwards. It almost looks like my tiger moustache. Turn the tips down to the style proper to the goat that you are! Fancy the airs of people nowadays!'

'Oh, Khan, don't get so excited,' said the moneylender, who was nothing if he was not amenable, having built up his business on the maxim that the customer is always right.

'I tell you, turn the tip of your moustache down if you value your life!' raged Khan Azam Khan.

'If that is all the trouble, here you are', said Ramanand, brushing one end of his moustache with his oily hand so that it dropped like a dead fly. 'Come, show me the trinkets. How much do you want for them?'

Now that Khan Azam Khan's pride was appeased, he was like soft wax in the merchant's sure hand. His need, and the need of his family for food, was great, and he humbly accepted the value which the moneylender put on his wife's nose-ring.

But as he was departing, after negotiating his business, he noticed that though one end of the moneylender's

moustache had come down at his behest, the other end was still up.

'A strange trick you have played on me, you swine,' the Khan said.

'I have paid you the best value for your trinket, Khan, that any moneylender will pay in these parts,' he said, 'especially in these days when the Sarkars of the whole world are threatening to go off the gold standard.'

'It has nothing to do with the trinket,' said Azam Khan, 'but one end of your moustache is still up like my tiger moustache though you have brought down the other to your proper goat's style. Bring that other end down also, so that there is no aping by your moustache of mine.'

'Now, Khan,' said the moneylender 'I humbled myself because you are doing business with me. You can't expect me to become a mere worm just because you have pawned a trinket with me. If you were pledging some more



expensive jewellery I might consider obliging you a little more. Anyhow, my humble milk-skimmer doesn't look a bit like your valiant tiger moustache.'

'Bring that tip down!' Khan Azam Khan roared, for the more he had looked at the moneylender's moustache the more the still upturned tip seemed to him like an effort at an imitation of his own.

'Now, be sensible, Khan,' the moneylender said, waving his hand with an imperturbable calm.

'I tell you, turn that tip down or I shall wring your neck,' said the Khan.

'All right, the next time you come to do business with me, I shall bring that tip down,' answered the moneylender cunningly.

'That is far,' said Chaudri Chottu Ram, the landlord of the village, who was sitting under the tree opposite.

'To be sure! To be sure!' some peasants chimed in sheepishly.

Khan Azam Khan managed to control his murderous impulses and walked away. But he could not quell his pride, the pride of the generations of his ancestors who had worn the tiger moustache as a mark of their high position. To see the symbol of his honour imitated by a moneylender — this was too much for him. He went home and fetched a necklace which had come down to his family through seven generations and, placing it before the moneylender, said:

'Now will you bring that tip of your moustache down?'

'By all means, Khan,' said the moneylender. 'But let us see about this necklace. How much do you want for it?'

'Any price will do, so long as you bring the tip of your moustache down,' answered Azam Khan.

After they had settled the business the moneylender said: 'Now Khan, I shall carry out your will.' And he ceremoniously brushed the upturned tip of his moustache down.

As Azam Khan was walking away, however, he noticed that the other tip of the moneylender's moustache had now gone up and stood dubiously like the upturned end of his own exalted tiger moustache. He turned on his feet and shouted:

'I shall kill you if you don't brush that moustache into the shape appropriate to your position as a lentil-eating moneylender!'

'Now, now, Khan, come to your senses. You know it is only the illusion of a tiger's moustache and nowhere like your brave and wonderful adornment,' said the greasy moneylender.

'I tell you I won't have you insulting the insignia of my order!' shouted Azam Khan. 'You bring that tip down!'

'I wouldn't do it, Khan, even if you pawned all the jewellery you possess to me,' said the moneylender.

'I would rather lost all my remaining worldly possessions, my pots and pans, my clothes, even my house, than see the tip of your moustache turned up like that!' spluttered Azam Khan.

'Acha, if you care so little for all your goods and chattels you sell them to me and then I shall turn that tip of my moustache down,' said the moneylender. 'And what is more, I shall keep it flat. Now, is that a bargain?'

'That seems fair enough,' said the landlord from under the tree where he was preparing for a siesta.

'But what proof have I that you will keep your word?' said Azam Khan. 'You oily lentil-eaters never keep your promises.'

'We shall draw up a deed, here and now,' said the moneylender. 'And we shall have it signed by the five elders of the village who are seated under that tree. What more do you want?'

'Now, there is no catch in that,' put in the landlord. 'I and four other elders will come to court as witnesses on your behalf if he doesn't keep his moustache to the goat style ever afterwards.'

'I shall excommunicate him from religion if he doesn't keep his word,' added the priest, who had arrived on the scene on hearing the hubbub.

'Acha,' agreed Azam Khan.

And he forthwith had a deed prepared by the petition writer of the village, who sat smoking his hubble-bubble under the tree. And this document, transferring all his household goods and chattels, was signed in the presence of the five elders of the village and sealed. And the moneylender forthwith brought both tips of his moustache down and kept them glued in the goat style appropriate to his order.

Only, as soon as Khan Azam Khan's back was turned he muttered to the peasants seated near by: 'My father was a Sultan.'

And they laughed to see the Khan give a special twist to his moustache, as he walked away maintaining the valiant uprightness to the symbol of his ancient and noble family, though he had become a pauper.

**MULK RAJ ANAND**

#### **GLOSSARY**

**mustachios** — plural of 'mustachio', a moustache, especially when bushy or elaborately shaped (often used in plural)

**resplendent** — bright and colourful in an impressive way; splendid

**uncanny** — mysterious; not natural or usual

**feudal gentry** — people belonging to noble or aristocratic families, such as Nawabs

**mementoes** — things that remind one of a person, a place, or an event

**trinkets** — small ornaments or pieces of jewellery

**heirloom** — an object that has belonged to the same family for several generations

**nouveau riche** — person who has recently become rich

**bourgeoisie** — the middle classes

**Charlie Chaplin** — British comedian, film actor, and director (1889-1977)

**Curzon** — Lord Curzon (1859-1923), Viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905

**beholden** — obliged

**mortgage** — transfer of the right of property as security for repayment of a loan

**vicinity** — neighbourhood

**dilapidated** — in a state of disrepair

**malicious** — vicious or mischievous

**imposter** — a person who pretends to be somebody else in order to deceive others

**vandalism** — wanton or deliberate destruction

**pawn** — to deposit an article as security for the repayment of a loan

**surlily** — in a rude or ill-tempered manner

**behest** — orders

**chimed in** — voiced agreement

**quell** — suppress

**greasy** — intending to please

**insignia** — a distinguishing sign or mark

**chattels** — articles of personal movable property

**siesta** — rest or nap, taken in the early afternoon

**excommunicate** — exclude or expel from the community

### COMPREHENSION

1. What purpose, according to the writer, do mustachios serve in India?
2. How many types of mustachios are mentioned? Which classes of people are they associated with?
3. Describe the Charlie Chaplin moustache in your own words.
4. Who was Khan Azam Khan? What was his social status?
5. Why did Khan Azam Khan go to the shop of Seth Ramanand?
6. Why was he annoyed by the look of Ramanand's mustachios?
7. Do you think that Ramanand deliberately upturned his mustachios to insult Khan Azam Khan? Or was there any other purpose behind it?
8. What did it cost Khan Azam Khan to get Ramanand's mustachios reverted to the goat style appropriate to his order?

**APPRECIATION**

1. 'With them clothes make the man, but to us mustachios make the man'. Explain.
2. Which of the two—Khan Azam Khan and Seth Ramanand—is more practical? And why?
3. Do you approve of Khan Azam Khan's action? Give your reasons.
4. Seth Ramanand mutters to the peasants when Khan Azam Khan turns back: 'My father was a Sultan.' What does this imply?
5. Would you laugh at or sympathize with the character of Khan Azam Khan? Give reasons for your answer

**DISCUSSION**

1. Most of us live under one delusion or another. Discuss.
2. Give some instances of false pride people generally show off in society.





---

## The Rocking-Horse Winner

*D. H. LAWRENCE (1895-1930) was born in a mining village near Nottingham in England. His father was a coal miner, and his mother a genteel and ambitious lady who had worked previously as a schoolmistress. Their conflicting interests had had a powerful impact on the physical and imaginative build-up of young Lawrence.*

*Lawrence wrote novels, poems, short stories, criticism and miscellaneous prose. His work, at its best, is marked by intensity of feeling, psychological insight, and vivid evocation of events, places and nature.*

THERE WAS a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love, and love turned to dust. She had bonny children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them. They looked at her coldly, as if they were finding fault with her. And hurriedly she felt she must cover up some fault in herself. Yet what it was that she must cover up she never knew. Nevertheless, when her children were present, she always felt the centre of her heart go hard. This troubled her, and in her manner she was all the more gentle and anxious for her children, as if she loved them very much. Only she herself knew that at the centre of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody. Everybody else said of her: 'She is such a good mother. She adores her children.' Only she herself, and her children themselves, knew it was not so. They read it in each other's eyes.

There were a boy and two little girls. They lived in a pleasant house, with a garden, and they had discreet

servants, and felt themselves superior to anyone in the neighbourhood.

Although they lived in style, they felt always an anxiety in the house. There was never enough money.

The mother had a small income, and the father had a small income, but not nearly enough for the social position which they had to keep up. The father went into town to some office. But though he had good prospects, these prospects never materialized. There was always the grinding sense of the shortage of money, though the style was always kept up.

At last the mother said: 'I will see if I can't make something.' But she did not know where to begin. She racked her brains, and tried this thing and the other, but could not find anything successful. The failure made deep lines come into her face. Her children were growing up, they would have to go to school. There must be more money, there must be more money. The father, who was always very handsome and expensive in his tastes, seemed as if he never would be able to do anything worth doing. And the mother, who had a great belief in herself, did not succeed any better, and her tastes were just as expensive.

And so the house came to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: There must be more money! There must be more money! The children could hear it all the time, though nobody said it aloud. They heard it at Christmas, when expensive and splendid toys filled the nursery. Behind the shining modern rocking-horse, behind the smart doll's house, a voice would start whispering: 'There must be more money! There must be more money!' And the children would stop playing, to listen for a moment. They would look into each other's eyes to see if they had all heard. And each one saw in the eyes of the other two that they too had heard. 'There must be more money! There must be more money!'

It came whispering from the springs of the still-swaying rocking-horse, and even the horse, bending his wooden,

champing head, heard it. The big doll, sitting so pink and smirking in her new pram, could hear it quite plainly, and seemed to be smirking all the more self-consciously because of it. The foolish puppy, too, that took the place of the teddy-bear, he was looking so extraordinarily foolish for no other reason but that he heard the secret whisper all over the house: 'There must be more money!'

Yet nobody ever said it aloud. The whisper was everywhere and therefore no one spoke it. Just as no one ever says 'We are breathing' in spite of the fact that breath is coming and going all the time.

'Mother,' said the boy Paul one day, 'why don't we keep a car of our own? Why do we always use uncle's, or else a taxi?'

'Because we're the poor members of the family,' said the mother.

'But why are we, mother?'

'Well — I suppose,' she said slowly and bitterly, 'it's because your father has no luck.'

The boy was silent for some time.

'Is luck money, mother?' he asked, rather timidly.

'No, Paul, Not quite. It's what causes you to have money.'

'Oh!', said Paul vaguely. 'I thought when Uncle Oscar said filthy lucre, it meant money.'

'Filthy lucre does mean money,' said the mother. 'But it's lucre, not luck.'

'Oh,' said the boy. 'Then what is luck, mother?'

'It's what causes you to have money. If you're lucky you have money. That's why it's better to be born lucky than rich. If you're rich, you may lose your money. But if you're lucky, you will always get more money.'

'Oh! Will you? And is father not lucky?'

'Very unlucky, I should say,' she said bitterly.

The boy watched her with unsure eyes.

'Why?' he asked.

'I don't know. Nobody ever knows why one person is lucky and another unlucky.'

'Do they? Nobody at all? Does nobody know?'

'Perhaps God. But He never tells.'

'He ought to, then. And aren't you lucky either, mother?'

'I can't be, if I married an unlucky husband.'

'But by yourself, aren't you?'

'I used to think I was, before I married. Now I think I am very unlucky indeed.'

'Why?'

'Well - never mind! Perhaps I'm not really,' she said.

The child looked at her to see if she meant it. But he saw, by the lines of her mouth, that she was only trying to hide something from him.

'Well, anyhow,' he said stoutly, 'I'm a lucky person.'

'Why?' said his mother, with a sudden laugh.

He stared at her. He didn't even know why he had said it.

'God told me,' he asserted, brazening it out.

'I hope He did, dear,' she said, again with a laugh, but rather bitter.

'He did, mother!'

'Excellent!' said the mother, using one of her husband's exclamations.

The boy saw she did not believe him; or rather, that she paid no attention to his assertion. This angered him somewhat, and made him want to compel her attention.

He went off by himself, vaguely, in a childish way, seeking for the clue to 'Luck'. Absorbed, taking no heed of other people, he went about with a sort of stealth, seeking inwardly for luck. He wanted luck. He wanted it, he wanted it. When the two girls were playing dolls in the nursery, he would sit on his big rocking-horse, charging madly into space, with a frenzy that made the little girls peer at him uneasily. Wildly the horse careered. The waving dark hair

of the boy tossed, his eyes had a strange glare in them. The little girls dared not speak to him.

When he had ridden to the end of his mad little journey he climbed down and stood in front of his rocking-horse, staring fixedly into its lowered face. Its red mouth was slightly open, its big eye was wide and glassy-bright.

'Now!' he would silently command the snorting steed. 'Now, take me to where there is luck. Now take me!'

And he would slash the horse on the neck with the little whip he had asked Uncle Oscar for. He knew the horse could take him to where there was luck, if only he forced it. So he would mount again and start on his furious ride, hoping at last to get there. He knew he could get there.

'You'll break your horse, Paul!' said the nurse.

'He's always riding like that. I wish he'd leave off,' said his sister, Joan.

But he only glared down on them in silence. Nurse gave him up. She could make nothing of him. Anyhow, he was growing beyond her.

One day his mother and his Uncle Oscar came in when he was on one of his furious rides. He did not speak to them.

'Hallo, you young jockey! Riding a winner?' said his uncle.

'Aren't you growing too big for a rocking-horse? You're not a very little boy any longer, you know,' said his mother.

But Paul only gave a blue glare from his big, rather close-set eyes. He would speak to nobody when he was in full tilt. His mother watched him with an anxious expression on her face.

At last he suddenly stopped forcing his horse into the mechanical gallop and slid down.

'Well, I got there,' he announced fiercely, his blue eyes still flaring, and his sturdy long legs straddling apart.

'Where did you get to?' asked his mother.

'Where I wanted to go,' he flared back at her.

'That's right, son!' said Uncle Oscar, 'Don't you stop till you get there. What's the horse's name?'

'He doesn't have a name' said the boy.

'Gets on without all right?' asked the uncle.

'Well, he has different names. He was called Sansovino last week?'

'Sansovino, eh? Won the Ascot. How did you know his name?'

'He always talks about horse-races with Bassett,' said Joan.

The uncle was delighted to find that his small nephew was posted with all the racing news. Bassett, the young gardener, who had been wounded in the left foot in the war and had got his present job through Oscar Cresswell, whose batman he had been, was a perfect blade of the 'turf'. He lived in the racing events, and the small boy lived with him.

Oscar Cresswell got it all from Bassett.

'Master Paul comes and asks me, so I can't do more than tell him, sir,' said Bassett, his face terribly serious, as if he were speaking of religious matters.

'And does he ever put anything on a horse he fancies?'

'Well—I don't want to give him away—he's a young sport, a fine sport, sir. Would you mind asking himself? He sort of takes a pleasure in it, and perhaps he'd feel I was giving him away, sir, if you don't mind.'

Bassett was serious as a church.

The uncle went back to his nephew and took him off for a ride in the car.

'Say, Paul, old man, do you ever put anything on a horse?' the uncle asked.

The boy watched the handsome man closely.

'Why, do you think I oughtn't to?' he parried.

'Not a bit of it! I thought perhaps you might give me a tip for the Lincoln.'

The car sped on into the country, going down to Uncle Oscar's place in Hampshire.

'Honor bright?' said the nephew.

'Honor bright, son!' said the uncle.

'Well, then, Daffodil.'

'Daffodil ! I doubt it, sonny. What about Mirza?'

'I only know the winner,' said the boy. 'That's Daffodil.'

'Daffodil, eh?'

There was a pause. Daffodil was an obscure horse comparatively.

'Uncle!'

'Yes, son?'

'You won't let it go any further, will you?' I promised Bassett.

'Bassett be damned, old man! What's he got to do with it?'

'We're partners. We've been partners from the first. Uncle, he lent me my first five shillings, which I lost. I promised him. Honor bright, it was only between me and him; only you gave me that ten-shilling note I started winning with, so I thought you were lucky. You won't let it go any further, will you?'

The boy gazed at his uncle from those big, hot, blue eyes, set rather close together. The uncle stirred and laughed uneasily.

'Right you are, son! I'll keep your tip private. Daffodil, eh? How much are you putting on him?'

'All except twenty pounds,' said the boy. 'I keep that in reserve.'

The uncle thought it a good joke.

'You keep twenty pounds in reserve, do you, you young romancer? What are you betting, then?'

'I'm betting three hundred,' said the boy gravely. 'But it's between you and me Uncle Oscar! Honor bright?'

The uncle burst into a roar of laughter.

'It's between you and me all right, you young Nat Gould,' he said, laughing. 'But where's your three hundred?'

'Bassette keeps it for me. We're partners.'

'You are, are you? And what is Bassett putting on Daffodil?'

'He won't go quite as high as I do, I expect. Perhaps he'll go a hundred and fifty.'

'What pennies?' laughed the uncle.

'Pounds,' said the child, with a surprised look at his uncle.

'Bassett keeps a bigger reserve than I do.'

Between wonder and amusement Uncle Oscar was silent. He pursued that matter no further, but he determined to take his nephew with him to the Lincoln races.

'Now, son,' he said, 'I'm putting twenty on Mirza, and I'll put five on for you on any horse you fancy. What's your pick?'

'Daffodil, uncle.'

'No, not the fiver on Daffodil.'

'I should if it was my own fiver,' said the child.

'Good! Good! Right you are! A fiver for me and a fiver for you on Daffodil.'

The child had never been to a race-meeting before, and his eyes were blue fire. He pursed his mouth tight and watched. A Frenchman just in front had put his money on Lancelot. Wild with excitement, he flayed his arms up and down, yelling 'Lancelot! Lancelot!' in his French accent.

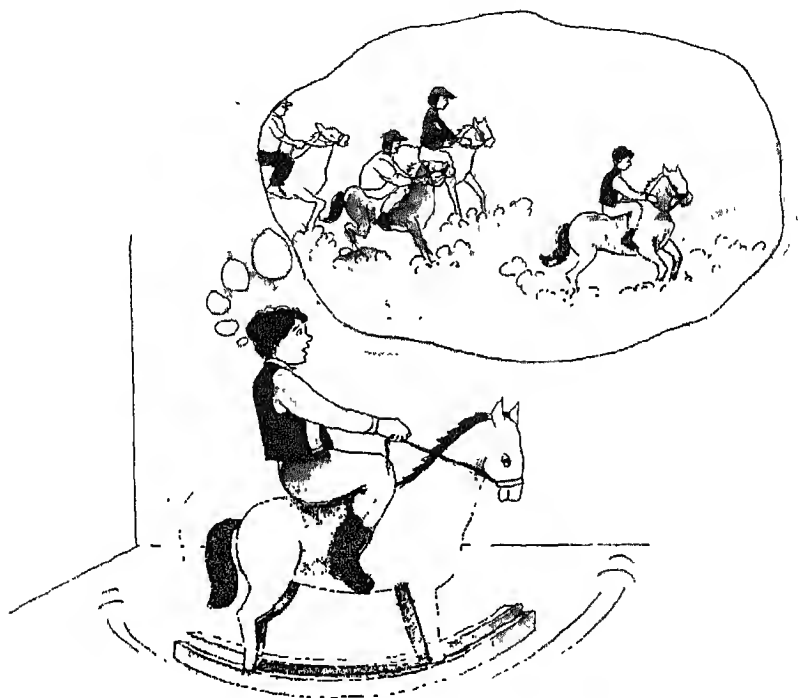
Daffodil came in first, Lancelot second, Mirza third. The child, flushed and with eyes blazing, was curiously serene. His uncle brought him four five-pound notes, four to one.

'What am I to do with these?' he cried, waving them before the boy's eyes.

"I suppose we'll talk to Bassett," said the boy. "I expect I have fifteen hundred now and twenty in reserve; and this twenty."

His uncle studied him for some moments.

"Look here, son!" he said, "You're not serious about Bassett and that fifteen hundred, are you?"



"Yes, I am. But it's between you and me, uncle. Honor bright?"

"Honor bright all right, son! But I must talk to Bassett."

"If you'd like to be a partner, uncle, with Bassette and me, we could all be partners. Only, you'd have to promise, Honor bright, uncle, not to let it go beyond us three. Bassette and I are lucky, and you must be lucky, because it was your ten shillings I started winning with...."

Uncle Oscar took both Bassett and Paul into Richmond Park for an afternoon, and there they talked.

'It's like this, you see, sir,' Bassett said. 'Master Paul would get me talking about racing events, spinning yarns, you know, sir. And he was always keen on knowing if I'd made or if I'd lost. It's about a year since, now, that I put five shillings on Blush of Dawn for him; and we lost. Then the luck turned, with that ten shillings he had from you: that we put on Singhalese. And since that time, it's been pretty steady, all things considering. 'What do you say, Master Paul?'

'We're all right when we're sure,' said Paul. 'It's when we're not quite sure that we go down.'

'Oh, but we're careful then,' said Bassett.

'But when are you sure?' smiled Uncle Oscar.

'It's Master Paul, sir,' said Bassett in a secret, religious voice. 'It's as if he had it from heaven. Like Daffodil, now, for the Lincoln. That was as sure as eggs.'

'Did you put anything on Daffodil?' asked Oscar Cresswell.

'Yes, sir. I made my bit.'

'And my nephew?'

Bassett was obstinately silent, looking at Paul.

'I made twelve hundred, didn't I, Bassett? I told uncle I was putting three hundred on Daffodil.'

'That's right,' said Bassett, nodding.

'But where's the money?' asked the uncle.

'I keep it safe locked up, sir. Master Paul, he can have it any minute he likes to ask for it.'

'What, fifteen hundred pounds?'

'And twenty. And forty, that is, with the twenty he made on the course.'

'It's amazing,' said the uncle.

'If Master Paul offers you to be partners, sir, I would, if I were you: if you'll excuse me,' said Bassett.

Oscar Cresswell thought about it.

'I'll see the money,' he said.

They drove home again, and, sure enough, Bassett came round to the garden-house with fifteen hundred pounds in notes. The twenty pounds reserve was left with Joe Glee, in the Turf Commission deposit.

'You see, it's all right, uncle, when I'm sure. Then we go strong, for all we're worth. Don't we, Bassett?'

'We do that, Master Paul.'

'And when are you sure?' said the uncle, laughing.

'Oh, well, sometimes I'm absolutely sure, like about Daffodil,' said the boy; 'and sometimes I have an idea; and sometimes I haven't even an idea, have I, Bassett? Then we're careful, because we mostly go down.'

'You do, do you? And when you're sure, like about Daffodil, what makes you sure, sonny?'

'Oh, well, I don't know,' said the boy uneasily. 'I'm sure, you know, uncle; that's all.'

'It's as if he had it from heaven, sir,' Bassett reiterated.

'I should say so!' said the uncle.

But he became a partner. And when the Leger was coming on Paul was 'sure' about Lively Spark, which was a quite inconsiderable horse. The boy insisted on putting a thousand on the horse, Bassett went for five hundred, and Oscar Cresswell two hundred. Lively Spark came in first, and the betting had been ten to one against him. Paul had made ten thousand.

'You see,' he said, 'I was absolutely sure of him.'

Even Oscar Cresswell had cleared two thousand.

'Look here, son,' he said, 'this sort of thing makes me nervous.'

'It needn't, uncle! Perhaps I shan't be sure again for a long time.'

'But what are you going to do with your money?' asked the uncle.

'Of course,' said the boy, 'I started it for mother. She said she had no luck, because father is unlucky, so I thought if I was lucky, it might stop whispering.'

'What might stop whispering?'

'Our house. I hate our house for whispering.'

'What does it whisper?'

'Why - why' - the boy fidgeted - 'why, I don't know. But it's always short of money, you know, uncle.'

'I know it, son, I know it.'

'You know people send mother writs, don't you, uncle?'

'I'm afraid I do,' said the uncle.

'And then the house whispers, like people laughing at you behind your back. It's awful, that is why I thought if I was lucky -'

'You might stop it,' added the uncle.

The boy watched him with big blue eyes, that had an uncanny cold fire in them, and he said never a word.

'Well, then,' said the uncle. 'What are we doing?'

'I shouldn't like mother to know I was lucky,' said the boy.

'Why not, son?'

'She'd stop me.'

'I don't think she would.'

'Oh!' - and the boy writhed in an odd way - 'I don't want her to know, uncle.'

'All right, son! We'll manage it without her knowing.' They managed it very easily. Paul, at the other's suggestion, handed over five thousand pounds to his uncle, who deposited it with the family lawyer, who was then to inform Paul's mother that a relative had put five thousand pounds into his hands, which sum was to be paid out a thousand pounds at a time, on the mother's birthday, for the next five years.

'So she'll have a birthday present of a thousand pounds for five successive years,' said Uncle Oscar. 'I hope it won't make it all the harder for her later.'

'Paul's mother had her birthday in November. The house had been 'whispering' worse than ever lately, and, even in

spite of his luck, Paul could not bear up against it. He was very anxious to see the effect of the birthday letter, telling his mother about the thousand pounds.

When there were no visitors, Paul now took his meals with his parents, as he was beyond the nursery control. His mother went into town nearly every day. She had discovered that she had an odd knack of sketching furs and dress materials, so she worked secretly in the studio of a friend who was the chief 'artist' for the leading drapers. She drew the figures of ladies in furs and ladies in silk and sequins for the newspaper advertisements. This young woman artist earned several thousand pounds a year, but Paul's mother only made several hundreds, and she was again dissatisfied. She so wanted to be first in something, and she did not succeed, even in making sketches for drapery advertisements.

She was down to breakfast on the morning of her birthday. Paul watched her face as she read her letters. He knew the lawyer's letter. As his mother read it, her face hardened and became more expressionless. Then, a cold determined look came on her mouth. She hid the letter under the pile of others, and said not a word about it.

'Didn't you have anything nice in the post for your birthday, mother?' said Paul.

'Quite moderately nice,' she said, her voice cold and absent.

She went away to town without saying more.

But in the afternoon Uncle Oscar appeared. He said Paul's mother had had a long interview with the lawyer, asking if the whole five thousand could not be advanced at once, as she was in debt.

'What do you think, uncle?' said the boy.

'I leave it to you, son.'

'Oh, let her have it, then! We can get some more with the other,' said the boy.

'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, laddie!' said Uncle Oscar.

'But I'm sure to know for the Grand National; or the Lincolnshire; or else the Derby. I'm sure to know for one of them,' said Paul.

So Uncle Oscar signed the agreement, and Paul's mother touched the whole five thousand. Then something very curious happened. The voices in the house suddenly went mad, like a chorus of frogs on a spring evening. There were certain new furnishings, and Paul had a tutor. He was really going to Eton, his father's school, in the following autumn. There were flowers in the winter, and a blossoming of the luxury Paul's mother had been used to. And yet the voices in the house, behind the sprays of mimosa and almond-blossoms, and from under the piles of iridescent cushions, simply trilled and screamed in a sort of ecstasy : 'There must be more money! Oh-h-h! There must be more money! Oh, now, now-w! Now-w-w there must be more money — more than ever! More than ever!'

It frightened Paul terribly. He studied away at his Latin and Greek with his tutor. But his intense hours were spent with Bassett. The Grand National had gone by; he had not 'known,' and had lost a hundred pounds. Summer was at hand. He was in agony for the Lincoln. But even for the Lincoln he didn't 'know,' and he lost fifty pounds. He became wild-eyed and strange, as if something were going to explode in him.

'Let it alone, son! Don't you bother about it,' urged Uncle Oscar. But it was as if the boy couldn't really hear what his uncle was saying.

'I've got to know for the Derby! I've got to know for the Derby!' the child reiterated, his big blue eyes blazing with a sort of madness.

His mother noticed how overwrought he was.

You'd better go to the seaside. Wouldn't you like to go now to the seaside, instead of waiting? I think you'd better,' she said, looking down at him anxiously, her heart curiously heavy because of him.

But the child lifted his uncanny blue eyes.

‘I couldn’t possibly go before the Derby, mother! he said. ‘I couldn’t possibly!’

‘Why not?’ she said, her voice becoming heavy when she was opposed. ‘Why not? You can still go from the seaside to see the Derby with your Uncle Oscar, if that’s what you wish. No need for you to wait here. Besides, I think you care too much about these races. It’s a bad sign. My family had been a gambling family, and you won’t know till you grow up how much damage it has done. But it has done damage. I shall have to send Bassett away, and ask Uncle Oscar not to talk racing to you, unless you promise to be reasonable about it: go away to the seaside and forget it. You’re all nerves!’

‘I’ll do what you like, mother, so long as you don’t send me away till after the Derby,’ the boy said.

‘Send you away from where? Just from this house?’

‘Yes,’ he said, gazing at her.

‘Why, you curious child, what makes you care about this house so much, suddenly? I never knew you loved it.’

He gazed at her without speaking. He had a secret within a secret, something he had not divulged, even to Bassett or to his Uncle Oscar.

But his mother, after standing undecided and a little bit sullen for some moments, said:

‘Very well, then! Don’t go to the seaside till after the Derby, if you don’t wish it. But promise me you won’t let your nerves go to pieces. Promise you won’t think so much about horse-racing and events, as you call them.’

‘Oh, no,’ said the boy casually. ‘I won’t think much about them, mother. You needn’t worry. I wouldn’t worry, mother, if I were you.’

‘If you were me and I were you,’ said his mother, ‘I wonder what we should do!’

‘But you know you needn’t worry, mother, don’t you?’ the boy repeated.

‘I should be awfully glad to know it,’ she said wearily.

'Oh, well, you can, you know, I mean, you ought to know you needn't worry,' he insisted.

'Ought I ? Then I'll see about it,' she said.

Paul's secret of secrets was his wooden horse, that which had no name. Since he was emancipated from a nurse and a nursery-governess, he had had his rocking-horse removed to his own bedroom at the top of the house.

'Surely you're too big for a rocking-horse', his mother had remonstrated.

'Well, you see, mother, till I can have a real horse, I like to have some sort of animal about,' had been his quaint answer.

'Do you feel he keeps you company?' She laughed.

'Oh, yes! He's very good, he always keeps me company, when I'm there,' said Paul.

So the horse, rather shabby, stood in an arrested prance in the boy's bedroom.

The Derby was drawing near, and the boy grew more and more tense. He hardly heard what was spoken to him, he was very frail, and his eyes were really uncanny. His mother had sudden strange seizures of uneasiness about him. Sometimes for half an hour, she would feel a sudden anxiety about him that was almost anguish. She wanted to rush to him at once, and know he was safe.

Two nights before the Derby, she was at a big party in town, when one of her rushes of anxiety about her boy, her firstborn, gripped her heart till she could hardly speak. She fought with the feeling, might and main, for she believed in common sense. But it was too strong. She had to leave the dance and go downstairs to telephone to the country. The children's nursery-governess was terribly surprised and started at being rung up in the night.

'Are the children all right, Miss Wilmot?'

'Oh yes, they are quite all right.'

'Master Paul? Is he all right?'

'He went to bed as right as a trivet. Shall I run up and look at him?'

'No,' said Paul's mother reluctantly. 'No. Don't trouble. It's all right. Don't sit up. We shall be home fairly soon.' She did not want her son's privacy intruded upon.

'Very good,' said the governess.

It was about one o'clock when Paul's mother and father drove up to their house. All was still. Paul's mother went to her room and slipped off her white fur cloak. She had told her maid not to wait up for her. She heard her husband downstairs, mixing a whisky and soda.

And then, because of the strange anxiety at her heart, she stole upstairs to her son's room. Noiselessly she went along the upper corridor. Was there a faint noise? What was it?

She stood, with arrested muscles, outside his door, listening. There was a strange, heavy, and yet not loud noise. Her heart stood still. It was a soundless noise, yet rushing and powerful. Something huge, in violent, hushed motion. What was it? What in God's name was it? She ought to know. She felt that she knew the noise. She knew what it was.

Yet she could not place it. She couldn't say what it was. And on and on it went, like a madness.

Softly, frozen with anxiety and fear, she turned the door handle.

The room was dark. Yet in the space near the window, she heard and saw something move to and fro. She gazed in fear and amazement.

Then suddenly she switched on the light, and saw her son, in his green pyjamas, madly surging on the rocking-horse. The blaze of light suddenly lit him up, as he urged the wooden horse, and lit her up, as she stood, blonde, in her dress of pale green and crystal, in the doorway.

'Paul,' she cried. 'Whatever are you doing?'

'It's Malabar!' he screamed in a powerful, strange voice. 'It's Malabar!'

His eyes blazed at her for one strange and senseless second, as he ceased urging his wooden horse. Then he fell with a crash to the ground, and she, all her tormented motherhood flooding upon her, rushed to gather him up.

But he was unconscious, and unconscious he remained, with some brain-fever. He talked and tossed, and his mother sat stonily by his side.

'Malabar! It's Malabar! Bassett! Bassett, I know! It's Malabar!'

So the child cried, trying to get up and urge the rocking-horse that gave him his inspiration.

'What does he mean by Malabar?' asked the heart-frozen mother. 'I don't know,' said the father stonily.

'What does he mean by Malabar?' she asked her brother Oscar.

'It's one of the horses running for the Derby,' was the answer.

'And, in spite of himself, Oscar Cresswell spoke to Bassett, and himself put a thousand on Malabar: at fourteen to one.

The third day of the illness was critical: they were waiting for a change. The boy, with his rather long, curly hair, was tossing ceaselessly on the pillow. He neither slept nor regained consciousness, and his eyes were like blue stones. His mother sat, feeling her heart had gone, turned actually into a stone.

In the evening, Oscar Cresswell did not come, but Bassett sent a message, saying could he come up for a moment, just one moment? Paul's mother was very angry at the intrusion, but on second thought she agreed. The boy was the same. Perhaps Bassett might bring him to consciousness.

The gardener, a shortish fellow with a little brown moustache and sharp little brown eyes, tiptoed into the room, touched his imaginary cap to Paul's mother, and stole to the bedside, staring with glittering, smallish eyes at the tossing, dying child.

'Master Paul,' he whispered, 'Master Paul! Malabar came in first all right, a clean win. I did as you told me. You've made over seventy thousand pounds, you have; you've got over eighty thousand. Malabar came in all right, Master Paul.'

'Malabar! Malabar! Did say Malabar, mother? Did I say Malabar? Do you think I'm lucky, mother? I knew Malabar, didn't I? Over eighty thousand pounds! I call that lucky, don't you, mother? Over eighty thousand pounds! I knew, didn't I know I knew? Malabar came in all right. If I ride my horse till I'm sure, then I tell you, Bassett, you can go as high as you like. Did you go for all you were worth, Bassett?

'I went a thousand on it, Master Paul.'

'I never told you, mother, that if I can ride my horse, and get there, then I'm absolutely sure—oh, absolutely mother, did I ever tell you? I am lucky!'

'No, you never did,' said his mother.

But the boy died in the night.

And even as he lay dead, his mother heard her brother's voice saying to her : 'My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand to the good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner.

**D.H. LAWRENCE**

#### GLOSSARY

**lucre** — money (especially in the phrase 'filthy lucre')

**brazening out** — facing and overcoming boldly

**careered** — moved swiftly along

**jockey** — a person who rides horses in races, especially as a profession

**straddling** — spreading (the legs) apart

**turf** — horse-racing

**parried** — evaded (question)

- spinning yarn** — telling fantastic stories  
**fidgeted** — made restless or uneasy movements  
**writs** — legal documents giving instructions to a person to do, or to refrain from doing something  
**sequin** — a small piece of shiny metal foil or plastic  
**Derby** — an annual horse race run at Epsom Downs, Surrey, England  
**prance** — (of horse) to jump high or more quickly by raising the front legs and springing forwards on the back legs  
**as right as a trivet** — in perfect health

**COMPREHENSION**

1. Was the mother's relation with her children amicable? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Why did the children always feel an anxiety in the house even though they lived in style?
3. Relate briefly the conversation between Paul and his mother. How far is it responsible for Paul's resorting to gambling later?
4. What, according to the mother, is the relationship between luck and money?
5. Who was Bassett? How was he responsible for building up Paul's passion for gambling?
6. In the beginning Uncle Oscar thought Paul's gambling tips mere childish fantasies. What made him change his mind later?
7. What was the effect of the 'birthday letter' on Paul's mother? Why was she not happy?
8. How did she spend five thousand pounds provided by Paul?
9. What was the secret of Paul's success?
10. How far is Paul's mother responsible for his tragic death?

**APPRECIATION**

1. What is implied by 'the unspoken phrase'? How does it haunt the house?
2. How does the author build up the idea that the house is haunted?
3. Why do you think the voices in house go mad when Paul's mother touches the whole amount of five thousand?

4. 'Poor devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of life', said Uncle Oscar at Paul's death. Why does he say this of Paul?
5. What role does the rocking-horse play in the story?
6. Do you think the title 'The Rocking Horse Winner' is apt for the story? Give reasons for the answer.

**Discussion**

1. Do you think women are more practical than men?
2. Mother exercises greater influence over the child than father. Discuss.





---

## What Men Live By

*Leo Tolstoy, spelled also as Tolstoi (1828-1910), is a world-famous Russian novelist and moral philosopher. Best known for his novels (such as War and Peace and Anna Karenina) he also wrote plays, essays and short stories. Several of these stories are small masterpieces. They are written in simple, plain narrative manner that Tolstoy conceived as the best style for all good literature. The stories embody a moral vision that transcends all denominations.*

### I

A SHOEMAKER named Simon, who had neither house nor land of his own, lived with his wife and children in a small hut and earned his living by his work. Work was cheap but bread was dear, and what he earned he spent for food. The man and his wife had but one sheepskin coat between them for winter wear, and even that was worn to tatters, and this was the second year he had been wanting to buy sheepskins for a new coat. Before winter Simon saved up a little money: a three-rouble note lay hidden in his wife's box, and five roubles and twenty kopeks were owed him by customers in the village.

So one morning he prepared to go to the village to buy the sheepskins. He put on over his shirt his wife's wadded nankeen jacket and over that he put his own cloth coat. He took the three-rouble note in his pocket, cut himself a stick to serve as a staff, and started off after breakfast. 'I'll collect the five roubles that are due to me' thought he, 'add the three I have got, and that will be enough to buy sheepskins for the winter coat.'

He came to the village and called at a peasant's hut but the man was not at home. The peasant's wife promised that the money should be paid next week, but she would not pay it herself. Then Simon called on another peasant, but this one swore he had no money, and would only pay twenty kopeks which he owed for a pair of boots Simon had mended. Simon then tried to buy the sheepskins on credit, but the dealer would not trust him.

So all the business the shoemaker did was to get the twenty kopeks for boots he had mended, and to take a pair of felt boots a peasant gave him to sole with leather.

Simon felt downhearted. He spent the twenty kopeks on vodka, and started homewards without having bought any skins. In the morning he had felt the frost; but now, after drinking the vodka, he felt warm even without a sheepskin coat. He trudged along, striking his stick on the frozen earth with one hand, swinging the felt boots with the other, and talking to himself.

'I'm quite warm' said he, 'though I have no sheepskin coat. I've had a drop and it runs through all my veins. I need no sheepskins. I go along and don't worry about anything. That's the sort of man I am. What do I care? I can live without sheepskins. I don't need them. My wife will fret, to be sure. And true enough, it is a shame; one works all day long and then does not get paid. Stop a bit. If you don't bring that money along, sure enough I'll skin you, blessed if I don't. How's that? He pays twenty kopeks at a time. What can I do with twenty kopeks? Hard up, he says he is. So he may be—but what about me? You have house, and cattle and everything ; I've only what I stand up in. You have corn of your own growing. I have to buy every grain. Do what I will, I must spend three roubles every week for bread alone. I come home and find the bread all used up and I have to fork out another rouble and a half. So just you pay up what you owe, and no nonsense about it.'

By this time he had nearly reached the shrine at the bend of the road. Looking up, he saw something whitish

behind the shrine. The daylight was fading, and the shoemaker peered at the thing without being able to make out what it was. There was no white stone here before. Can it be an ox? It's not like an ox. It has a head like a man, but it's too white; and what could a man be doing there?'

He came closer, so that it was clearly visible. To his surprise it really was a man, alive or dead, sitting naked, leaning motionless against the shrine. Terror seized the shoemaker, and he thought, 'Some one has killed him, stripped him, and left him here. If I meddle I shall surely get into trouble.'

So the shoemaker went on. He passed in front of the shrine so that he could not see the man. When he had gone some way he looked back, and saw that the man was no longer leaning against the shrine, but was moving as if looking towards him. The shoemaker felt more frightened than before, and thought, 'Shall I go back to him or shall I go on? If I go near him something dreadful may happen. Who knows who the fellow is? He has not come here for any good. If I go near him he may jump up and throttle me, and there will be no getting away. Or if not, he'd still be a burden on one's hands. What could I do with a naked man? I couldn't give him my last clothes. Heaven only help me to get away.'

So the shoemaker hurried on, leaving the shrine behind him—when suddenly his conscience smote him and he stopped in the road.

'What are you doing, Simon?' said he to himself. 'The man may be dying of want, and you slip past afraid. Have you grown so rich as to be afraid of robbers? Ah, Simon, shame on you.'

So he turned back and went up to the man.

## II

SIMON APPROACHED the stranger, looked at him, and saw that he was a young man, fit, with no bruises on his body, but evidently freezing and frightened, and he sat there leaning

back without looking up at Simon, as if too faint to lift his eyes. Simon went close to him and then the man seemed to wake up. Turning his head, he opened his eyes and looked into Simon's face. That one look was enough to make Simon fond of the man. He threw the felt boots on the ground, undid his sash, laid it on the boots, and took off his cloth coat.

'It's not a time for talking,' said he. 'Come, put this coat on at once.' And Simon took the man by the elbows and helped him to rise. As he stood there, Simon saw that his body was clean and in good condition, his hands and feet shapely, and his face good and kind. He threw his coat over the man's shoulders, but the latter could not find the sleeves. Simon guided his arms into them, and drawing the coat well on, wrapped it closely about him, tying the sash round the man's waist.

Simon even took off his torn cap to put it on the man's head, but then his own head felt cold and he thought: 'I'm quite bald, while he has long curly hair.' So he put his cap on his own head again. 'It will be better to give him something for his feet,' thought he; and he made the man sit down and helped him to put on the felt boots, saying "There, friend, now move about and warm yourself. Other matters can be settled later on. Can you walk?"

The man stood up and looked kindly at Simon, but could not say a word.

'Why don't you speak?', said Simon. 'It's too cold to stay here, we must be getting home. There now, take my stick, and if you're feeling weak lean on that. Now step out.'

The man started walking and moved easily, not lagging behind.

As they went along, Simon asked him, 'And where do you belong to?'

'I'm not from these parts.'

'I thought as much. I know the folks hereabouts. But how did you come to be there by the shrine?'

'I cannot tell.'

'Has some one ill-treated you?'

'No one has ill-treated me. God has punished me.'

'Of course God rules all. Still, you'll have to find food and shelter somewhere. Where do you want to go?'

'It is all the same to me.'

Simon was amazed. The man did not look like a rogue, and he spoke gently, but yet he gave no account of himself. And he said to the stranger: 'Well then, come home with me and at least warm yourself awhile.'

So Simon walked towards his home, and the stranger kept up with him, walking at his side. The wind had risen and Simon felt it cold under his shirt. He was getting over his tipsiness by now and began to feel the frost. He went along sniffing and wrapping his wife's coat round him and he thought to himself: 'There now — talk about sheepskins. I went out for sheepskins and come home without even a coat to my back, and what is more, I'm bringing a naked man along with me. Matrena won't be pleased.' And when he thought of his wife he felt sad; but when he looked at the stranger and remembered how he had looked up at him at the shrine, his heart was glad.

### III

SIMON'S WIFE had everything ready early that day. She had cut wood, brought water, fed the children, eaten her own meal, and now she sat thinking. She wondered when she ought to make bread: now or tomorrow? There was still a large piece left.

'If Simon has had some dinner in town,' thought she, 'and does not eat much for supper, the bread will last out another day.'

She weighed the piece of bread in her hand again and again, and thought: 'I won't make any more today. We have only enough flour left to bake one batch. We can manage to make this last out till Friday.'

So Matrena put away the bread, and sat down at the table to patch her husband's shirt. While she worked she

thought how her husband was buying skins for a winter coat.

'If only the dealer does not cheat him. My good man is much too simple ; he cheats nobody, but any child can take him in. Eight roubles is a lot of money—he should get a good coat at that price. Not tanned skins, but still a proper coat. How difficult it was last winter to get on without a warm coat. I could neither get down to the river, nor go out anywhere. When he went out he put on all he had and there was nothing left for me. He did not start very early today, but still it's time, he was back. I only hope he has not gone on the spree.'

Hardly had Matrena thought this than steps were heard on the threshold and some one entered. Matrena stuck her needle into her work and went out into the passage. There she saw two men: Simon and with him a man without a hat and wearing felt boots.

Matrena noticed at once that her husband smelt of spirits. 'There now he has been drinking,' thought she. And when she saw that he was coatless, had only her jacket on, brought no parcel, stood there silent and seemed ashamed, her heart was ready to break with disappointment. 'He has drunk the money,' thought she, 'and has been on the spree with some good-for-nothing fellow whom he has brought home with him.'

Matrena let them pass into the hut, followed them in and saw that the stranger was a young, slight man, wearing her husband's coat. There was no shirt to be seen under it, and he had no hat. Having entered he stood neither moving nor raising his eyes, and Matrena thought: 'He must be a bad man—he's afraid.'

Matrena frowned, and stood beside the stove looking to see what they would do.

Simon took off his cap and sat down on the bench as if things were all right.

'Come, Matrena; if supper is ready, let us have some.'

Matrena muttered something to herself and did not

move, but stayed where she was, by the stove. She looked first at the one and then at the other of them and only shook her head. Simon saw that his wife was annoyed, but tried to pass it off. Pretending not to notice anything, he took the stranger by the arm.

'Sit down, friend,' said he, 'and let us have some supper.'

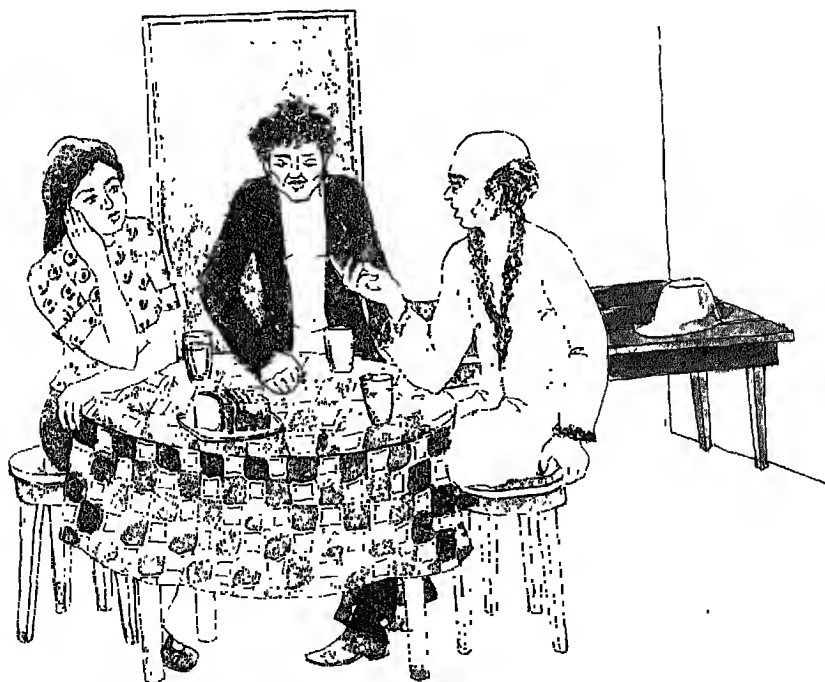
The stranger sat down on the bench.

'Haven't you cooked anything for us?' said Simon.

Matrena's anger boiled over. 'I've cooked, but not for you. It seems to me you have drunk your wits away. You went to buy a sheepskin coat, but come home without so much as the coat you had on, and bring a naked vagabond home with you. I have no supper for drunkards like you.'

'That's enough, Matrena. Don't wag your tongue without reason. You had better ask what sort of man—'

'And you tell me what you've done with the money?'



Simon found the pocket of the jacket, drew out the three-rouble note, and unfolded it.

'Here is the money. Trifonov did not pay, but promises to pay soon.'

Matrena got still more angry ; he had bought no sheepskins, but had put his only coat on some naked fellow and had even brought him to their house.

She snatched up the note from the table, took it to put away in safety, and said : 'I have no supper for you. We can't feed all the naked drunkards in the world.'

'There now, Matrena, hold your tongue a bit. First hear what a man has to say.'

'Much wisdom I shall hear from a drunken fool. I was right in not wanting to marry you—a drunkard.' The linen my mother gave me you drank; and now you've been to buy a coat—and have drunk it too.'

Simon tried to explain to his wife that he had only spent twenty kopeks; tried to tell how he had found the man—but Matrena would not let him get a word in. She talked nineteen to the dozen, and dragged in things that had happened ten years before.

Matrena talked and talked, and at last she flew at Simon and seized him by the sleeve.

'Give me my jacket. It is the only one I have, and you mustn't take it from me and wear it yourself. Give it here, you mangy dog, and may the devil take you.'

Simon began to pull off the jacket, and turned a sleeve of it inside out; Matrena seized the jacket and it burst its seams. She snatched it up, threw it over her head and went to the door. She meant to go out, but stopped undecided—she wanted to work off her anger, but she also wanted to learn what sort of a man the stranger was!

#### IV

MATRENA STOPPED and said : 'If he were a good man he would not be naked. Why, he hasn't even a shirt on him. If he were all right, you would say where you came across the fellow.'

'That's just what I am trying to tell you,' said Simon. 'As I came to the shrine I saw him sitting all naked and frozen. It isn't quite the weather to sit about naked. God sent me to him or he would have perished. What was I to do? How do we know what may have happened to him? So I took him, clothed him, and brought him along. Don't be so angry, Matrena. It is a sin. Remember, we must all die one day.'

Angry words rose to Matrena's lips, but she looked at the stranger and was silent. He sat on the edge of the bench, motionless, his hands folded on his knees, his head drooping on his breast, his eyes closed, and his brows knit as if in pain. Matrena was silent, and Simon said: 'Matrena, have you no love of God?'

Matrena heard these words, and as she looked at the stranger, suddenly her heart softened towards him. She came back from the door, and going to the stove she got out the supper. Setting a cup on the table, she poured out some kvass. Then she brought out the last piece of bread and set out a knife and spoons.

'Eat, if you want to,' said she.

Simon drew the stranger to the table.

'Take your place, young man,' said he.

Simon cut the bread, crumbled it into the broth, and they began to eat. Matrena sat at the corner of the table, resting her head on her hand and looking at the stranger.

And Matrena was touched with pity for the stranger and began to feel fond of him. And at once the stranger's face lit up; his brows were no longer bent, he raised his eyes and smiled at Matrena.

When they had finished supper, the woman cleared away the things and began questioning the stranger.

'Where are you from?' said she.

'I am not from these parts.'

'But how did you come to be on the road?'

'I may not tell.'

'Did some one rob you?'

'God punished me.'

'And you were lying there naked?'

'Yes, naked and freezing. Simon saw me and had pity on me. He took off his coat, put it on me, and brought me here. And you have fed me, given me drink, and shown pity on me. God will reward you.'

Matrena rose, took from the window Simon's old shirt she had been patching, and gave it to the stranger. She also brought out a pair of trousers for him.

'There,' said she, 'I see you have no shirt. Put this on, and lie down where you please, in the loft or on the stove.'

The stranger took off the coat, put on the shirt, and lay down in the loft. Matrena put out the candle, took the coat and climbed to where her husband lay on the stove.

Matrena drew the skirts of the coat over her and lay down but could not sleep; she could not get the stranger out of her mind.

When she remembered that he had eaten their last piece of bread and that there was none for tomorrow, and thought of the shirt and trousers she had given away, she felt grieved; but when she remembered how he had smiled, her heart was glad.

Long did Matrena lie awake, and she noticed that Simon also was awake—he drew the coat towards him...

'Simon.'

'Well?'

'You have had the last of the bread and I have not put any to rise. I don't know what we shall do tomorrow. Perhaps I can borrow some from neighbour Martha.'

'If we're alive we shall find something to eat.'

The woman lay still a while, and then said. 'He seems a good man, but why does he not tell us who he is?'

'I suppose he has his reasons.'

'Simon.'

'Well?'

'We give; but why does nobody give us anything?'

Simon did not know what to say : so he only said, 'Let us stop talking,' and turned over and went to sleep.

## V

IN THE morning Simon awoke. The children were still asleep; his wife had gone to the neighbour's to borrow some bread. The stranger alone was sitting on the bench, dressed in the old shirt and trousers, and looking upwards. His face was brighter than it had been the day before.

Simon said to him, 'Well friend; the belly wants bread and the naked body clothes. One has to work for a living. What work do you know?'

'I do not know any.'

This surprised Simon, but he said, 'Men who want to learn can learn anything.'

'Men work and I will work also.'

'What is your name?'

'Michael.'

'Well, Michael, if you don't wish to talk about yourself, that is your own affair, but you'll have to earn a living for yourself. If you will work as I tell you, I will give you food and shelter.'

'May God reward you. I will learn. Show me what to do.'

Simon took yarn, put it round his thumb and began to twist it.

'It is easy enough—see.'

Michael watched him, put some yarn round his own thumb in the same way, caught the knack, and twisted the yarn also.

Then Simon showed him how to twist the bristle in, and how to sew, and this, too, Michael learned at once.

Whatever Simon showed him he understood at once, and after three days he worked as if had sewn boots all his life. He worked without stopping and ate little. When

work was over he sat silently, looking upwards. He hardly went into the street, spoke only when necessary, and neither joked nor laughed. They never saw him smile, except that first evening when Matrena gave them supper.

## VI

DAY BY DAY and week by week the year went round. Michael lived and worked with Simon. His fame spread till people said that no one sewed boots so neatly and strongly as Simon's workman, Michael; from all the district round people came to Simon for their boots, and he began to be well off.

One winter day, as Simon and Michael sat working a carriage on sledge-runners, with three horses and bell, drove up to the hut. They looked out of the window; the carriage stopped at their door, a fine servant jumped down from the box and opened the door. A gentleman in a fur coat got out and walked up to Simon's hut. Up jumped Matrena and opened the door wide. The gentleman stooped to enter the hut, and when he drew himself up again his head nearly reached the ceiling and he seemed quite to fill his end of the room.

Simon rose, bowed, and looked at the gentleman with astonishment. He had never seen any one like him. Simon himself was lean, Michael was thin, and Matrena was dry as a bone, but this man was like some one from another world : red-faced, burly, with a neck like a bull's and looking altogether as if he were cast in iron.

The gentleman puffed, threw off his fur coat, sat down on the bench, and said, 'Which of you is the master boot-maker?'

'I am, your Excellency,' said Simon, coming forward.

Then the gentleman shouted to his lad, 'Hey, Fedka, bring the leather.'

The servant ran in, bringing a parcel. The gentleman took the parcel and put it on the table.

'Untie it,' said he. The lad untied it.

The gentleman pointed to the leather.

'Look here, shoemaker,' said he, 'do you see this leather?'

'Yes, your honour.'

'But do you know what sort of leather it is?'

Simon felt the leather and said, 'It is good leather.'

'Good, indeed. Why, you fool, you never saw such leather before in your life. It's German, and cost twenty roubles.'

Simon was frightened, and said, 'Where should I ever see leather like that?'

'Just so. Now, can you make it into boots for me?'

'Yes, your Excellency, I can.'

Then the gentleman shouted at him: 'You can, can you? Well, remember whom you are to make them for, and what the leather is. You must make me boots that will wear for a year, neither losing shape nor coming unsewn. If you can do it, take the leather and cut it up: but if you can't, say so. I warn you now, if your boots come unsewn or lose shape within a year I will have you put in prison. If they don't burst or lose shape for a year, I will pay you ten roubles for your work.'

Simon was frightened and did not know what to say. He glanced at Michael and nudging him with his elbow, whispered: 'Shall I take the work?'

Michael nodded his head as if to say, 'Yes, take it.'

Simon did as Michael advised and undertook to make boots that would not lose shape or split for a whole year.

Calling his servant, the gentleman told him to pull the boots off his left leg, which he stretched out.

'Take my measure,' said he.

Simon stitched a paper measure seventeen inches long, smoothed it out, knelt down, wiped his hands on his apron so as not to soil the gentleman's sock, and began to measure. He measured the sole, and found the instep, and began to measure the calf of the leg, but the paper was too short. The calf of the leg was as thick as a beam.

'Mind you don't make it too tight in the leg.'



Simon stitched on another strip of paper. The gentleman twitched his toes about in his sock looking round at those in the hut, and as he did so he noticed Michael.

‘Who have you there?’ asked he.

‘That is my workman. He will sew the boots.’

‘Mind,’ said the gentleman to Michael, ‘remember to make them so that they will last me a year.’

Simon also looked at Michael, and saw that Michael was not looking at the gentleman, but was gazing into the corner behind the gentleman, as if he saw some one there. Michael looked and looked, and suddenly he smiled, and his face became brighter.

‘What are you grinning at, you fool?’ thundered the gentleman. ‘You had better look to it that the boots are ready in time.’

‘They shall be ready in good time,’ said Michael.

‘Mind it is so,’ said the gentleman, and he put on his boots and his fur coat, wrapped the latter round him, and went to the door. But he forgot to stoop, and struck his head against the lintel.

He swore and rubbed his head. Then he took his seat in the carriage and drove away.

When he had gone, Simon said: 'There's a figure of a man for you. You could not kill him with a mallet. He almost knocked out the lintel, but little harm it did him.'

And Matrena said: 'Living as he does, how should he not grow strong? Death itself can't touch such a rook as that.'

## VII

THEN SIMON said to Michael: 'Well, we have taken the work, but we must see we don't get into trouble over it. The leather is dear, and the gentleman hot-tempered. We must make no mistakes. Come, your eye is truer and your hands have become nimbler than mine, so you take this measure and cut out the boots. I will finish off the sewing of the vamps.'

Michael did as he was told. He took the leather, spread it out on the table, folded it in two, took a knife and began to cut out.

Matrena came and watched him cutting, and was surprised to see how he was doing it. Matrena was accustomed to seeing boots made, and she looked and saw that Michael was not cutting the leather for boots, but was cutting it round.

She wished to say something, but she thought to herself: 'Perhaps I do not understand how gentleman's boots should be made. I suppose Michael knows more about it—and I won't interfere.'

When Michael had cut up the leather he took a thread and began to sew not with two ends, as boots are sewn, but with a single end; as for soft slippers.

Again Matrena wondered, but again she did not interfere. Michael sewed on steadily till noon. Then Simon rose for dinner, looked around, and saw that Michael had made slippers out of the gentleman's leather.

'Ah,' groaned Simon, and he thought, 'How is it that Michael, who has been with me a whole year and never

made a mistake before, should do such a dreadful thing? The gentleman ordered high boots, welted, with whole fronts, and Michael has made soft slippers with single soles, and has wasted the leather.

'What am I to say to the gentleman? I can never replace leather such as this.'

And he said to Michael, 'What are you doing, friend? You have ruined me. You know the gentleman ordered high boots, but see what you have made.'

Hardly had he begun to rebuke Michael, when 'rat-tat' went the iron ring that hung at the door. Some one was knocking. They looked out of the window; a man had come on horseback and was fastening his horse. They opened the door, and the servant who had been with the gentleman came in.

'Good day,' said he.

'Good day,' replied Simon. 'What can we do for you?'

'My mistress has sent me about the boots.'

'What about the boots?'

'Why my master no longer needs them. He is dead.'

'Is it possible?'

'He did not live to get home after leaving you, but died in the carriage. When we reached home and the servants came to help him alight, he rolled over like a sack. He was dead already, and so stiff that he could hardly be got out of the carriage. My mistress sent me here, saying: "Tell the bootmaker that the gentleman who ordered boots of him and left the leather for them no longer needs the boots, but that he must quickly make soft slippers for the corpse. Wait till they are ready and bring them back with you." That is why I have come.'

Michael gathered up the remnants of the leather; rolled them up, took the soft slippers he had made, slapped them together, wiped them down with his apron, and handed them the roll of leather to the servant, who took them and said: 'Goodbye, masters, and good day to you.'

## VIII

ANOTHER YEAR passed, and another, and Michael was now living his sixth year with Simon. He lived as before. He went nowhere, only spoke when necessary, and had only smiled twice in all those years—once when Matrena gave him food, and a second time when the gentleman was in their hut. Simon was more than pleased with his workman. He never now asked him where he came from, and only feared lest Michael should go away.

They were all at home one day. Matrena was putting iron pots in the oven; the children were running along the benches and looking out of the window; Simon was sewing at one window and Michael was fastening on a heel at the other.

One of the boys ran along the bench to Michael, leant on his shoulder, and looked out of the window.

'Look, uncle Michael. There is a lady with little girls. She seems to be coming here. And one of the girls is lame.'

When the boy said that, Michael dropped his work, turned to the window, and looked out into the street.

Simon was surprised, Michael never used to look out into the street, but now he pressed against the window, staring at something. Simon also looked out and saw that a well-dressed woman was really coming to his hut, leading by the hand two little girls in fur coats and woollen shawls. The girls could hardly be told one from the other, except that one of them was crippled in her left leg and walked with a limp.

The woman stepped into the porch and entered the passage.

Feeling about for the entrance she found the latch, which she lifted and opened the door. She let the two girls go in first, and followed them into the hut.

'Good day, good folk.'

'Pray come in,' said Simon. 'What can we do for you?'

The woman sat down by the table. The two little girls pressed close to her knees, afraid of the people in the hut.

'I want leather shoes made for these two little girls for spring.'

'We can do that. We never have made such small shoes but we can make them; either welted or turnover shoes, linen-lined. My man, Michael is a master at the work.'

Simon glanced at Michael and saw that he had left his work and was sitting with his eyes fixed on the little girls. Simon was surprised. It was true the girls were pretty, with black eyes, plump and rosy cheeked, and they wore nice kerchiefs and coats, but still Simon could not understand why Michael should look at them like that—just as if he had known them before. He was puzzled, but went on talking with the woman and arranging the price. Having fixed it, he prepared the measure. The woman lifted the lame girl on to her lap and said: 'Take two measures from this little girl. Make one shoe for the lame foot and three for the sound one. They both have the same sized feet. They are twins.'

Simon took the measure and, speaking of the lame girl, said: 'How did it happen to her? She is such a pretty girl. Was she born so?'

'No, her mother crushed her leg.'

Then Matrena joined in. She wondered who this woman was and whose the children were, so she said: 'Are not you their mother, then?'

'No, my good woman; I am neither their mother nor any relation to them. They were quite strangers to me, but I adopted them.'

'They are not your children and yet you are so fond of them?'

'How can I help being fond of them? I fed them both at my own breasts. I had a child of my own, but God took him. I was not so fond of him as I now am of these.'

'Then whose children are they?'

The woman, having begun talking, told them the whole story.

'It is about six years since their parents died, both in one week; their father was buried on the Tuesday, and their mother died on the Friday. These orphans were born three days after their father's death, and their mother did not live another day. My husband and I were then living as peasants in the village. Their father was a lonely man, a wood-cutter in the forest. When felling trees one day they let one fall on him. It fell across his body and crushed his bowels out. They hardly got him home before his soul went to God; and that same week his wife gave birth to twins—these little girls. She was poor and alone; she had no one, young or old with her. Alone she gave them birth, and alone she met her death.'

'The next morning I went to see her, but when I entered the hut, the poor thing was already stark and cold. In dying she had rolled on to this child and crushed her leg. The village folk came to the hut, washed the body, laid her out, made a coffin, and buried her. They were good folk. The babies were left alone. What was to be done with them? I was the only woman there who had a baby at the time. I was nursing my first born—eight weeks old. So I took them for a time. The peasants came together, and thought and thought what to do with them; and at last they said to me: "For the present, Mary, you had better keep the girls, and later on we will arrange what to do for them." So I nursed the sound one at my breast but at first I did not feed this crippled one. I did not suppose she would live. But then I thought to myself, why should the poor innocent suffer? I pitied her and began to feed her. And so I fed my own boy and these two—the three of them—at my own breast. I was young and strong and had good food, and God gave me much milk that at times it even overflowed. I used sometimes to feed two at a time, while the third was waiting. When one had had enough I nursed the third. And God so ordered it that these grew up, while my own was buried before he was two years old. And I had no more children though we prospered. Now my husband is working for the corn merchant at the mill. The pay is good and we are well off. But I have no children of my

own, and how lonely I should be without these little girls. How can I help loving them? They are the joy of my life.'

She pressed the lame little girl to her with one hand, while with the other she wiped the tears from her cheeks.

And Matrena sighed and said; 'The proverb is true that says, "One may live without father or mother, but one cannot live without God.'

So they talked together, when suddenly the whole hut lighted up as though by summer lightning from the corner where Michael sat. They all looked towards him and saw him sitting, his hands folded on his knees, gazing upwards and smiling.

## X

THE WOMAN went away with the girls. Michael rose from the bench, put down his work and took off his apron. Then, bowing low to Simon and his wife, he said: 'Farewell, masters. God has forgiven me. I ask forgiveness, too, for anything done amiss.'

And they saw that a light shone from Michael. And Simon rose, bowed down to Michael, and said: 'I see, Michael, that you are no common man, and I can neither keep you nor question you. Only tell me this: how is it that when I found you and brought you home, you were gloomy, and when my wife gave you food you smiled at her and became brighter? Then when the gentleman came to order the boots, you smiled again and became brighter still? And now, when this woman brought the little girls, you smiled a third time and have become as bright as day? Tell me Michael, why did your face shine so, and why did you smile those three times?'

And Michael answered: 'Light shines from me because I have been punished, but now God has pardoned me. And I smiled three times, because God sent me to learn three truths, and I have learnt them. One I learnt when your wife pitied me, and that is why I smiled the first time. The second I learnt when the rich man ordered the boots, and then I smiled again. And now, when I saw those little

girls, I learnt the third and last truth and I smiled the third time.'

And Simon said, 'Tell me, Michael, what did God punish you for? And what were the three truths that I too may know them.'

And Michael answered: 'God punished me for disobeying him. I was an angel in heaven and disobeyed God. God sent me to fetch a woman's soul. I flew to earth, and saw a sick woman lying alone who had just given birth to twin girls. They moved feebly at their mother's side but she could not lift them to her breast. When she saw me, she understood that God had sent me for her soul, and she wept and said: "Angel of God, my husband has just been buried, killed by a falling tree. I have neither sister, nor aunt, nor mother: no one to care for my orphans. Do not take my soul. Let me nurse my babes, feed them, and set them on their feet before I die. Children cannot live without father or mother." And I hearkened to her and I placed one child at her breast and gave the other into her arms, and returned to the Lord in heaven. I flew to the Lord, and said: "I could not take the soul of the mother. Her husband was killed by a tree; the woman has twins and prays that her soul may not be taken. She says: 'Let me nurse and feed my children, and set them on their feet. Children cannot live without father or mother.' I have not taken her soul." And God said: "Go, take the mother's soul, and learn three truths: learn what dwells in man, what is not given to man and what men live by. When thou hast learnt these things, thou shalt return to heaven.' So I flew again to earth and took the mother's soul. The babes dropped from her breasts. Her body rolled over on the bed and crushed one baby, twisting its leg. I rose above the village, wishing to take her soul to God, but a wind seized me and my wings dropped off. Her soul rose alone to God, while I fell to earth by the roadside.'

## XI

AND SIMON and Matrena understood who it was that had lived with them, and whom they had clothed and fed. And

they wept with awe and with joy. And the angel said: 'I was alone in the field, naked. I had never known human needs, cold and hunger, till I became a man. I was famished, frozen, and did not know what to do. I saw, near the field I was in, a shrine for God, and I went to it hoping to find shelter. But the shrine was locked and I could not enter. So I sat down behind the shrine to shelter myself at least from the wind. Evening drew on. I was hungry, frozen and in pain. Suddenly I heard a man coming along the road. He carried a pair of boots and was talking to himself. For the first time since I became a man I saw the mortal face of a man, and his face seemed terrible to me and I turned from it. And I heard the man talking to himself of how to cover his body from the cold in winter, and how to feed his wife and children. And I thought: "I am perishing of cold and hunger and here is a man thinking only of how to clothe himself and his wife, and how to get bread for themselves. He cannot help me." When the man saw me by the other side, I despaired; but suddenly I heard him coming back. I looked up and did not recognize the same man; before, I had seen death in his face; but now he was alive and I recognized in him the presence of God. He came up to me, clothed me, took me with him and brought me to his home. I entered the house; a woman came to meet us and began to speak. The woman was still more terrible than the man had been; the spirit of death came from her mouth; I could not breathe for the stench of death that spread around her. She wished to drive me out into the cold, and I knew that if she did so she would die. Suddenly her husband spoke to her of God, and the woman changed at once. And when she brought food and looked at me, I glanced at her and saw that death no longer dwelt in her; she had become alive, and in her too I saw God.

'Then I remembered the first lesson God had set me: "Learn What dwells in man." And I understood that in man dwells Love. I was glad that God had already begun to show me what he had promised and I smiled for the first time. But I had not yet learnt all. I did not yet know. What is not given to man, and What men live by.

'I lived with you and a year passed. A man came to order boots that should wear for a year without losing shape or cracking. I looked at him, and suddenly, behind his shoulder, I saw my comrade—the angel of death. None but me saw that angel; but I knew him, and knew that before the sun set he would take that rich man's soul. And I thought to myself, "The man is making preparations for a year and does not know that he will die before evening." And I remembered God's second saying, "Learn what is not given to man."

'What dwells in man I already knew. Now I learnt what is not given him. It is not given to man to know his own needs. And I smiled for the second time. I was glad to have seen my comrade angel—glad also that God had revealed to me the second saying.

'But I still did not know all. I did not know what men live by. And I lived on, waiting till God should reveal to me the last lesson. In the sixth year came the girl-twins with the woman; and I recognized the girls and heard how they had been kept alive. Having heard the story, I thought, "Their mother besought me for the children's sake, and I believed her when she said that children cannot live without father or mother; but a stranger has nursed them and has brought them up." And when the woman showed her love for the children that were not her own, and wept over them, I saw in it What men live by. And I knew her the living God, and understood that God had revealed to me the last lesson, and had forgiven my sin. And then I smiled for the third time.'

And the angel's body was bared, and he was clothed in light so that eye could not look on him; and his voice grew louder, as though it came not from him but from heaven above. And the angel said:

'I have learnt that all men live not by care for themselves, but by love.

'It was not given to the mother to know what her children needed for their life. Nor was it given to any man

to know whether, when evening comes, he will need boots for his body or slippers for his corpse.

'I remained alive when I was a man, not by care of myself but because love was present in a passerby, and because he and his wife pitied and loved me. The orphans remained alive not because of their mother's care but because there was love in the heart of a woman, a stranger to them, who pitied and loved them. And all men live not by the thought they spend on their own welfare, but because love exists in man.



'I knew before that God gave life to men and desires that they should live; now I understood more than that.

'I understood that God does not wish men to live apart, and therefore he does not reveal to them what each one needs for himself; but he wishes them to live united, and therefore reveals to each of them what is necessary for all.

'I have now understood that though it seems to men that they live by care for themselves, in truth it is love alone by which they live. He who has love, is in God, and God is in him, for God is love.'

And the angel sang praise to God, so that the hut trembled at his voice. The roof opened, and a column of fire rose from earth to heaven. Simon and his wife and children fell to the ground. Wings appeared upon the angel's shoulders and he rose into the heavens.

And when Simon came to himself the hut stood as before, and there was no one in it but his own family.

LEO TOLSTOY

#### GLOSSARY

- fork out** — to pay (money), especially with reluctance  
**tipsiness** — from 'tipsy,' meaning slightly drunk  
**spree** — a session of over indulgency, especially in drinking, squandering money, etc  
**kvass** — a non-intoxicating drink  
**mallet** — a hammer with a large wooden head  
**vamps** — the front part of the upper of a shoe

#### COMPREHENSION

1. Who was Simon? What was his profession?
2. Why was he not able to buy the sheepskins?
3. Why did Simon hurry on after seeing the man beside the shrine? What made him come to him again?
4. What was Matrena's reaction when Simon returned home with a stranger?
5. What changes in Michael's behaviour could be seen on the day the lady with the two girls visited Simon?
6. On three occasions did Michael smile in the story. Which

- are those?
- 7. Why did he smile on these occasions?
- 8. What are the three truths that Michael learnt?

**APPRECIATION**

1. Michael says: 'It is not given to man to know his own needs'. Which incident in the story illustrates this truth?
2. Michael says of Matrena: 'and when she brought food and looked at me, I glanced at her and saw that death no longer dwelt in her'. Explain the underlying meaning.
3. What do you understand by the statement: 'All men live not by care for themselves, but by love'?
4. Do you think the views expressed in the story are relevant in present times?

**DISCUSSION**

1. One can live without father or mother, but one cannot live without love. Comment.
2. 'Man does not live by bread alone'. Discuss.





## Sparrows

KHWAJA AHMAD ABBAS (1914-1987) was born in Panipat. Besides being a journalist, he wrote a number of novels, short stories and film-scripts. His stories are collected in five volumes. *Sparrows* is a story of sublime beauty and great depth.

THE SUN was setting behind the mango grove which fringed the western extremity of the village when Rahim Khan returned from the fields. Broad and strong despite his fifty odd years, with the plough on his shoulders, and driving his two oxen, he walked through the main street of the village with a haughty and unfriendly air. As he approached the chaupal, where a dozen or so peasants were collected for their evening smoke, the hilarious tones of gossip died down to cautious whispers. It was only when he had vanished round the corner and the heavy tread of his footsteps was heard no more that Kallu, passing the community hookah to another, remarked, 'There goes the hard-hearted devil!' To which Nanha, the fat sweet-seller, added: 'He is getting worse and worse every day. Only yesterday he beat poor Ramoo's child for throwing a pebble at his oxen.' Ramnath, the officious zaildar, volunteered further details of Rahim Khan's recent cruelties. 'And the other day he very nearly killed my mare for straying into his field.' The zaildar, of course, thought it quite irrelevant to mention that the straying of his mare had been specially planned by his own mischievous sons. The old, grey-haired Patel was, as usual, the last to open his toothless mouth. And, as usual, his words were prefaced by a pious invocation to the Almighty. 'Hare Ram! Hare Ram!' he

muttered, 'I have never seen such a cruel man. He has compassion neither for the child nor for the helpless animal. No wonder his own sons have run away from home.'

The subject of their conversation, meanwhile, had reached his hut which, almost symbolically, stood gaunt and aloof, at a distance from the neighbouring cluster of houses. Leaning the plough up against the low wall of his house, he proceeded to tie the oxen to a pair of big wooden stakes embedded in the ground just in front of the doorway.

'Bhai Rahim Khan!' an obsequious voice said behind him as he was about to enter the house.

'What is it?' he gruffly queried, turning round to address the old woman who had come out of the house nearest his own. As she hesitated to speak, he fired a volley of questions : 'What is it? I won't eat you. Why don't you speak, woman? Has your son been arrested again for revenue arrears or has your daughter-in-law delivered another baby?'

As he stopped for breath, the woman summoned up all her courage to utter two words, 'Your wife ...' '...has run away.' He completed the sentence with a grin, which broadened with the realization that he had guessed right.

'No, no,' the woman hastily explained with an apologetic look, as if she herself were responsible for his wife's absence. 'She has only gone to her brother at Nurpur and will be back in a few days.'

'Bhai!' he flung back at her, opening the door. He knew that his wife would never come back.

Seething with inward wrath he entered the dark hut and sat down on the charpoy. A cat mewed in a corner. Finding no one else to vent his anger on he flung it out, slamming the door with violence.

There was not one to give him water, to wash his dustladen feet and hands, no one to give him supper, no one whom he could curse and beat. Rahim Khan felt uncomfortable and unhappy. He had always been angry with his wife when she was there, but her absence angered him still more.

'So, she's gone,' he mused, laying down on the cot, having decided to go to sleep without his food. During the thirty years of their married life he had always felt that she would leave him one day and, at one time, he had even hoped she would. Six years ago, his eldest son Bundu had run away from home because of a more than usual severe beating. Three years later, the younger one, Nuru, joined his brother. Since that day, Rahim Khan felt sure his wife, too, would run away to her brother's house. But, now that she had gone, he felt unhappy – not sorry, no, for he had never loved his wife—but only uncomfortable, as if a necessary piece of furniture had been removed. With her gone, on whom could he shower the outpourings of an embittered heart?

For thirty years his wife had been both the symbol and target of all his grievances against family, against society, against life.

As a youth there had been none in the village to beat him in feats of athletic skill—in wrestling, in kabaddi, in diving from the canal bridge. He had loved a girl, and wanted to join a touring circus which happened to pass through the village. In a circus he had felt, lay the key to his ambitions – a career after his own heart—travel, fame. And in Radha, the daughter of Ram Charan, the village shopkeeper, he thought he had found his soulmate. He had first noticed her watching him at a wrestling match and it had been the greatest moment of his life when, standing up after vanquishing his adversary, he had found Radha looking at him with the light of love in her eyes. After that there had been a few brief and furtive meetings when the unlettered but romantic youth had declared his love in passionate though halting words. But his parents had killed both ambitions. Circus work was too lowly and immoral for a respectable peasant. Anyway, his father, grandfather and all his ancestors had tilled the land, so he, too, had to do it. As for marrying Radha, a Hindu, the very idea was infamous and irreligious.

For some time, Rahim Khan, with youthful resentment, toyed with the idea of open rebellion. But the tradition of

centuries of serfdom ran in his blood, and, however indignant he might have felt at his father's severity, he could not summon up enough courage to defy paternal authority and social traditions. After a few days, the circus left the village without Rahim Khan, and the furtive romance with Radha, too, came to an abrupt end. Rahim Khan's father slyly suggested to Ram Charan that his daughter was now fifteen and ought to have been married long ago, not failing to hint at the disastrous consequences of late marriages. Within a few weeks Radha was married to Ram Lal, a middle-aged, pot-bellied shopkeeper of the neighbouring village. With a few sad tears shed in the solitude of the night in memory of her hopeless romance with Rahim Khan, she quickly reconciled herself to her fate and proceeded forthwith to be the mother of half-a-dozen children.

Rahim Khan also married. He had, of course, no choice in the matter. His parents selected the girl, fixed the date, ordered some gaudy clothes for him and some silver ornaments for his bride, sat high on a horse and, to the beat of a brass band, took him to the girl's house where the *nikah* was duly performed. To the Kazi's formal questions Rahim Khan mechanically nodded his head. Any other course was impossible. Nobody, of course, cared to ask the shy little girl who sat huddled in a dark room only dimly conscious of the fate to which she had been condemned. After the ceremony, Rahim Khan's father, in a mood of self-congratulation, boasted to his wife; 'See how meekly he obeyed me. You always feared he might refuse to fall in with our arrangements. I know these youngsters. They are apt to be restless if their marriage is delayed. That is why our fathers believed in marrying away their children early. Now he will be all right!'

At that very moment, standing on the threshold of the room, where his wife awaited him much as a sheep awaits the butcher, Rahim Khan made a terrible resolve to avenge himself on his parents, his family, on society. He held them all responsible for the frustration of his life's dreams. And in his confused, illogical mind he regarded his bride

as the symbol of persecution to which he had been subjected. On her he would wreak his vengeance. Iron entered his hitherto kindly soul as he rudely pushed open the door.

That was thirty years ago, Rahim Khan reflected as he lay there on his cot in the dark hut. And hadn't he had his revenge? For thirty years he had ill-treated his wife, his children and his bullocks, quarrelled with everyone in the village and made himself the most hated person in the whole community. The thought of being so universally detested gave him grim satisfaction.

No one in the village, of course, understood or tried to understand the reasons for this strange transformation of the cheerful and kind young man into the beast that he had become. At first, their attitude towards him was one of astonished hostility, but later it changed to indifference mingled with fear. Of understanding and sympathy he received none. Shunned by everyone, with a bitterness ever gnawing at his heart, Rahim Khan sought consolation in the unquestioned authority over his wife which society allowed him.

For thirty years his wife had submitted to his persecution with the slave-like docility that is the badge of her tribe. Lately, indeed, she had become so used to corporal chastisement that it seemed unnatural if a whole week passed without a beating. To Rahim Khan beating his wife had become a part of his very existence. As sleep gathered round him, his last thought was whether he would be able to endure life without having an opportunity of indulging in what had now become second nature. It was perhaps the only moment when Rahim Khan had a feeling, not exactly of affection for his wife, but of loneliness without her. Never before had he realized how much the woman he hated was a part of his life.

When he awoke it was already late forenoon and he started the day by cursing his wife, for it was she who used to wake him up early every morning. But he was in no great hurry today. Lazily he got up and, after his

ablutions, milked the goats for his breakfast which consisted of the remains of the previous day's chappatis soaked in the fresh milk. Then he sat down for a smoke, with his beloved hookah beside him. Now the hut was warm and alight with the rays of the sun streaming in through the open window. In a corner they revealed some cobwebs and, having already decided to absent himself from his fields, he thought he would tidy his hut. Tying some rags to the end of the long pole, he was about to remove the cobwebs when he saw a nest in the thatched roof. Two sparrows were fluttering in and out, twittering constantly.

His first impulse was to wreck the nest with one stroke of his pole, but something within him made him desist. Throwing down the pole, he brought a stool and climbed up on it to get a better view of the sparrow's home. Two little featherless mites of red flesh, baby sparrows hardly a day old, lay inside, while their parents hovered round Rahim Khan's face, screaming threateningly. He barely had a glimpse of the inside of the nest when the mother sparrow attacked him.

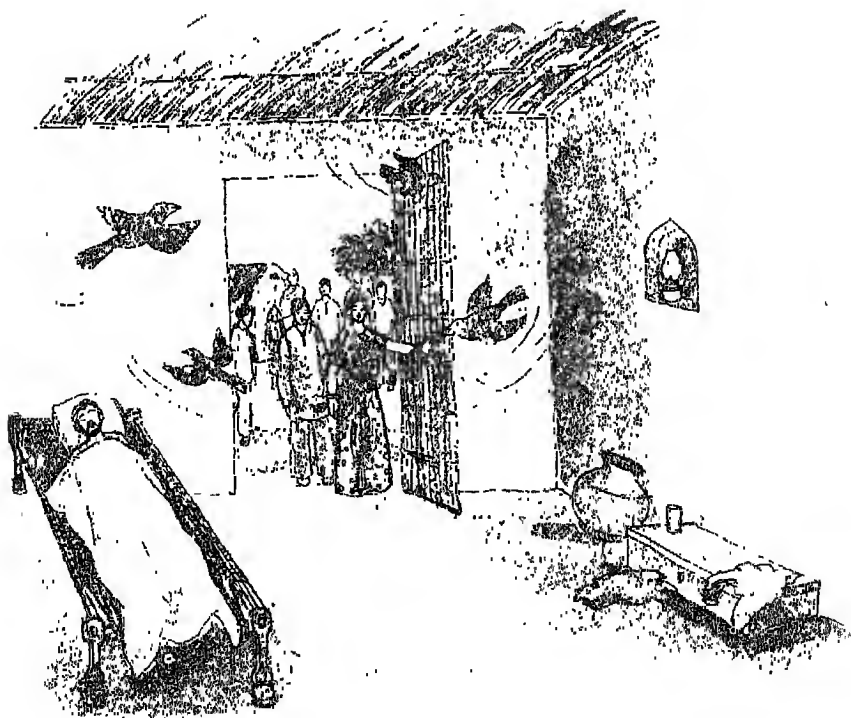
'Oh damn you vixen, you might have plucked out my eye,' exclaimed Rahim Khan with his characteristic hollow laugh and climbed down from his perch. He was strangely amused by the little bird's heroic efforts to save her home and children. The sparrow's nest suffered no harm that day and peace reigned in Rahim Khan's hut.

Next day he resumed his daily work. Still no one talked to him in the village. From morning till late in the afternoon he would toil in the field, ploughing the furrow and watering the crops, but he returned home before sunset. Then he would lie on his cot, smoking his hookah and watching with lively interest the antics of the sparrow family. The two little ones had now grown into fine young birds, and he called them Nuru and Bundu after his lost sons whom he had not seen for several years. The four sparrows were his only friends in the world. His neighbours were still frightened of him and regarded his recent peaceful behaviour with suspicion. They were genuinely

astonished that for some time no one had seen him beating his bullocks. Nathoo and Chhiddoo themselves were happy and grateful and their bruised bodies had almost healed.

One monsoon evening, when the sky was overcast with threatening clouds, Rahim Khan returned from the fields a little earlier than usual. He found a group of children playing on the road. They ran away as they saw him, and even left their shoes behind in their haste. In vain did Rahim Khan shout, 'Why are you running away? I am not going to beat you.' Meanwhile, it had started drizzling and he hurried homewards to tie up the bullocks before the big downpour came.

Entering his hut, Rahim Khan lighted the earthenware oil lamp and placed some crumbs of bread for the sparrows before he prepared his own dinner. 'O Nuru! O Bundul' he



shouted, but the sparrows did not come out. Anxious to find out what had happened to his friends, he peered into the nest and found the quartet scared and sitting huddled up within their feathers. At the very spot where the nest lay, the roof was leaking. Rahim Khan took a ladder and went out in the pouring rain to repair the damage. By the time the job was satisfactorily done he was thoroughly drenched. As he sat on the cot, Rahim Khan sneezed, but he did not heed the warning and went to sleep. Next morning he awoke with a high fever.

When the villagers did not see him going to the fields for several days, they grew anxious and some of them came to see what was the matter. Through a crack in the door they saw him lying on the cot talking, so they thought, to himself, 'O Bundu, O Nuru, who will feed you when I am gone?'

The peasants shook their heads sympathetically. 'Poor fellow,' they said, 'he has gone mad. We will send for his wife to look after him.'

Next morning when Rahim Khan's wife, anxious and weeping, came with her sons, a group of neighbours collected in sympathy. The door was locked from the inside, and in spite of loud knocking no one opened it. When they broke their way in they found the large and gaunt frame of Rahim lying in the brooding silence of the room, broken only by the fluttering of four sparrows.

K.A. ABBAS

#### GLOSSARY

**officious** — eager to help

**gaunt** — (of place) desolate; bleak — (of a person) made exceptionally thin by hunger or suffering

**obsequious** — submissive

**gruffly** — in a rough or surly manner

**vanquishing** — defeating

**furtive** — secret

**serfdom** — servility

**persecution** — cruel treatment

**docility** — submissiveness

**corporal chastisement** — physical punishment

**ablution** — washing of the body (or part of it)

**mites** — (here) small creatures

**perch** — a pole, branch, or other resting place above ground

### COMPREHENSION

1. What was Rahim Khan's occupation?
2. What were Rahim Khan's ambitions as a young man? Were they fulfilled?
3. Why did Rahim Khan not oppose his marriage arranged by his parents?
4. What was the cause of Rahim Khan's cruelty to men and animals?
5. What was Rahim Khan's reaction when he heard that his wife had gone away?
6. Who did Rahim Khan hold responsible for the frustration of his dreams? How did he avenge himself?
7. How did Rahim Khan feel when a group of children ran away on seeing him?
8. What made Rahim Khan desist from destroying the sparrows' nest?
9. What was his only worry during the last moments of his life?
10. What role do sparrows play in the story?

### APPRECIATION

1. '...he walked ... with a haughty and unfriendly air'. What does this suggest about Rahim Khan's character?
2. '...the hilarious tones of gossip died down to cautious whispers'. What does this suggest about the villagers' attitude towards Rahim Khan?
3. What is meant by the statement: 'His wife had been both the symbol and target of all his grievances'?
4. 'Iron entered his hitherto kindly soul'. Explain.
5. What glimpses of Rahim Khan's kindly soul do you find in the story?
6. What trait of Rahim Khan's character is highlighted at the end of the story?

### DISCUSSION

1. Society made Rahim Khan what he was. Discuss.
2. Birds and animals have rights like human beings. Discuss.



---

## The Lament

ANTON CHEKHOV (1810-1904) was born in a middle-class family in Russia. He studied medicine at Moscow University. He is considered as one of the founding fathers of modern short story. His first story appeared in 1880, and in the next seven years he produced more than six hundred stories.

*The main theme of Chekhov's short stories is life's pathos, caused by the inability of human beings to respond to, or even to communicate with, one another. The present story illustrates this point beautifully.*

It is twilight. A thick wet snow is slowly twirling around the newly lighted street lamps, and lying in soft thin layers on roofs, on horses' backs, on people's shoulders and hats. The cabdriver Iona Potapov is quite white, and looks like a phantom; he is bent double as far as a human body can bend double; he is seated on his box; he never makes a move. If a whole snowdrift fell on him, it seems as if he would not find it necessary to shake it off. His little horse is also quite white, and remains motionless; its immobility, its angularity, and its straight wooden-looking legs, even close by, give it the appearance of a gingerbread horse worth a *kopek*. It is, no doubt, plunged in deep thought. If you were snatched from the plow, from your usual gray surroundings, and were thrown into this slough full of monstrous lights, unceasing noise, and hurrying people, you too would find it difficult not to think.

Iona and his little horse have not moved from their place for a long while. They left their yard before dinner, and up to now, not a fare. The evening mist is descending over the town, the white lights of the lamps replacing

brighter rays, and the hubbub of the street getting louder. 'Cabby for Viborg Way!' suddenly hears Iona. 'Cabby!'

Iona jumps, and through his snow-covered eyelashes sees an officer in a greatcoat, with his hood over his head.

'Viborg way!' the officer repeats. 'Are you asleep, eh? Viborg way!'

With a nod of assent Iona picks up the reins, in consequence of which layers of snow slip off the horse's back and neck. The officer seats himself in the sleigh, the cabdriver smacks his lips to encourage his horse, stretches out his neck like a swan, sits up, and, more from habit than necessity, brandishes his whip. The little horse also stretches its neck, bends its wooden-looking legs, and makes a move undecidedly.

'What are you doing, werewolf!' is the exclamation Iona hears from the dark mass moving to and fro, as soon as they have started.

'Where the devil are you going? To the r-r-right!'

'You do not know how to drive. Keep to the right!' calls the officer angrily.

A coachman from a private carriage swears at him; a passerby, who has run across the road and rubbed his shoulder against the horse's nose, looks at him furiously as he sweeps the snow from his sleeve. Iona shifts about on his seat as if he were on needles, moves his elbows as if he were trying to keep his equilibrium, and gaps about like someone suffocating, who does not understand why and wherefore he is there.

'What scoundrel they all are!' jokes the officer; 'one would think they had all entered into an agreement to jostle you or fall under your horse.'

Iona looks round at the officer, and moves his lips. He evidently wants to say something, but the only sound that issues is a snuffle.

'What?' asks the officer.

Iona twists his mouth into a smile, and with an effort says hoarsely:

'My son, Barin, died this week.'

'Hm! What did he die of?'

Iona turns with his whole body toward his fare, and says: 'And who knows! They say high fever. He was three days in the hospital and then died ... God's will be done.'

'Turn round! The devill' sounds from the darkness. 'Have you popped off, old doggie, eh? Use your eyes!'

'Go on, go on,' says the officer, 'otherwise we shall not get there by tomorrow. Hurry up a bit!'

The cabdriver again stretches his neck, sits up, and, with a bad grace, brandishes his whip. Several times again he turns to look at his fare, but the latter has closed his eyes, and apparently is not disposed to listen. Having deposited the officer in the Viborg, he stops by the tavern, doubles himself up on his seat, and again remains motionless, while the snow once more begins to cover him and his horse. An hour, and another ... Then, along the footpath, with a squeak of galoshes, and quarrelling, come three young men, two of them tall and lanky, the third one short and humpbacked.

'Cabby, to the Police Bridge!' in a cracked voice call the humpback. 'The three of us for two *griveniks*.'

Iona picks up his reins, and smacks his lips. Two *griveniks* is not a fair price, but he does not mind whether it is a *rouble* or five *kopeks* – to him it is all the same now, so long as they are fares. The young men, jostling each other and using bad language, approach the sleigh, and all three at once try to get onto the seat; then begins a discussion as to which two shall sit and who shall be the one to stand. After wrangling, abusing each other, and much petulance, it is at last decided that the humpback shall stand, as he is the smallest.

'Now then, hurry up!' says the humpback in a twanging voice, as he takes his place and breathes in Iona's neck. 'Old furry! Here, mate, what a cap you have! There is not a worse one to be found in all Petersburg! ...'

'He-he – he-he', giggles Iona. 'Such a...'

'Now you, "such a", hurry up, are you going the whole way at this pace? Are you...Do you want it in the neck?'

'My head feels like bursting,' says one of the lanky ones. 'Last night at the Donkmasoves, Vaska and I drank the whole of four bottles of cognac.'

'I don't understand what you lie for,' says the other lanky one angrily; 'you lie like a brute.'

'God strike me, it's the truth!'

'It's as much the truth as that a louse coughs!'

'He, he,' grins Iona, 'what gay young gentlemen!'

'Pshaw, go to the devil!' says the humpback indignantly.

'Are you going to get on or not, you old pest? Is that the way to drive? Use the whip a bit! Go on, devil, go on, give it to him well!'

Iona feels at his back the little man wriggling, and the tremble in his voice. He listens to the insults hurled at him, sees the people, and little by little the feeling of loneliness leaves him. The humpback goes on swearing until he gets mixed up in some elaborate six-foot oath, or chokes with coughing. The lankies begin to talk about a certain Nadejda Petrovna. Iona looks round at them several times; he waits for a temporary silence, then, turning round again, he murmurs:

'My son...died this week.'

'We must all die,' sighs the humpback, wiping his lips after an attack of coughing. 'Now, hurry up, hurry up! Gentlemen, I really cannot go any farther like this! When will he get us there?'

'Well, just you stimulate him a little in the neck!'

'You old pest, do you hear, I'll bone your neck for you! If one treated the like of you with ceremony one would have to go on foot! Do you hear, old serpent Gorinytch! Or do you not care a spit!'

Iona hears rather than feels the blow they deal him.

'He, he' he laughs. 'They are gay young gentlemen, God bless'em!'

'Cabby, are you married?' asks a lanky one.

'I? He, he, gay young gentlemen! Now I have only a wife and the moist ground...He, ho, ho, ...that is to say, the grave. My son has died, and I am alive...A wonderful thing, death mistook the door...instead of coming to me, it went to my son...'

Iona turns round to tell them how his son died, but at this moment, the humpback, giving a little sigh, announces, 'Thank God, we have at last reached our destination,' and Iona watches them disappear through the dark entrance. Once more he is alone, and again surrounded by silence...His grief, which has abated for a short while, returns and rends his heart with greater force. With an anxious and hurried look, he searches among the crowds passing on either side of the street to find whether there may be just one person who will listen to him. But the crowds hurry by without noticing him or his trouble. Yet it is such an immense, illimitable, grief. Should his heart break and the grief pour out, it would flow over the whole earth, so it seems, and yet no one sees it. It has managed to conceal itself in such an insignificant shell that no one can see it even by day and with a light.

Iona sees a hall porter with some sacking, and decides to talk to him.

'Friend, what sort of time is it?' he asks.

'Past nine. What are you standing here for? Move on.'

Iona moves on a few steps, doubles himself up, and abandons himself to his grief. He sees it is useless to turn to people for help. In less than five minutes he straightens himself, holds up his head as if he felt some sharp pain, and gives a tug at the reins; he can bear it no longer. 'The stables,' he thinks, and the little horse, as if it understood, starts off at a trot.

About an hour and a half later Iona is seated by a large dirty stove. Around the stove, on the floor, on the benches, people are snoring; the air is thick and suffocatingly hot. Iona looks at the sleepers, scratches himself, and regrets having returned so early.

'I have not even earned my fodder,' he thinks. 'That's what's my trouble. A man who knows his job, who has had enough to eat and his horse too, can always sleep peacefully.'

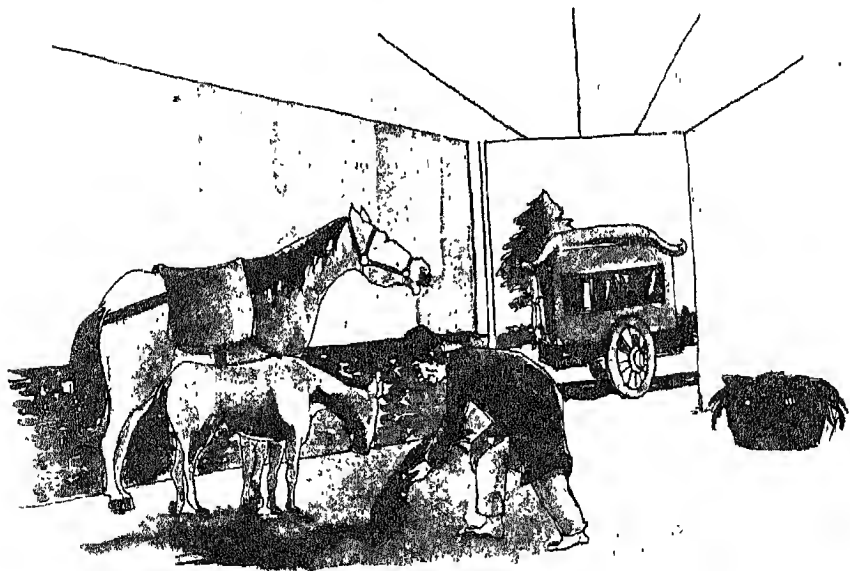
A young cabdriver in one of the corners half gets up, grunts sleepily, and stretches towards a bucket of water.

'Do you want a drink?' Iona asks him.

'Don't I want a drink!'

'That's so? Your good health. But listen, mate—you know, my son is dead...Did you hear? This week, in the hospital...It's a long story.'

Iona looks to see what effect his words have, but sees none – the young man has hidden his face and is fast



asleep again. The old man sighs, and scratches his head. Just as much as the young one wants to drink, the old man wants to talk. It will soon be a week since his son died, and he has not been able to speak about it properly to anyone. One must tell it slowly and carefully; how his son fell ill, how he suffered, what he said before he died,

how he died. One must describe every detail of the funeral, and the journey to the hospital to fetch the dead son's clothes. His daughter Anissia has remained in the village—one must talk about her too. It is nothing he has to tell? Surely the listener would gasp and sigh, and sympathize with him? It is better too, to talk to women; two words are enough to make them sob.

'I'll go and look after my horse,' thinks Iona; 'there's always time to sleep. No fear of that!'

He puts on his coat, and goes to the stable to his horse; he thinks of the corn, the hay, the weather. When he is alone, he dares not think of his son; he can speak about him to anyone, but to think of him, and picture him to himself, is unbearably painful.

'Are you tucking in?' Iona asks his horse, looking at its bright eyes'; 'go on, tuck in, though we've not earned our corn, we can eat hay. Yes I am too old to drive—my son could have, not I. He was a first-rate cabdriver. If only he had lived!'

Iona is silent for a moment, then continues:

'That's how it is, my old horse. There's no more Kuzma Ionitch. He has left us to live, and he went off pop. Now let's say, you had a foal, you were the foal's mother, and suddenly, let's say, that foal went and left you to live after him. It would be sad, wouldn't it?'

The little horse munches, listens, and breathes over its master's hand...

Iona's feelings are too much for him, and he tells the little horse the whole story.

ANTON CHEKHOV

GLOSSARY

**gingerbread** — shiny but worthless. The allusion is to gingerbread cakes fashioned like men, animals, etc.

**slough** — a hollow filled with mud; bog

**sleigh** — a sledge pulled by a horse

**werewolf** (in stories) — a person who changes into a wolf

**snuffle** — the act of breathing noisily

**galoshes** — a pair of waterproof overshoes

**at a trot** — at a steady pace that is faster than a walk but slower than a canter

#### COMPREHENSION

1. What does Iona want to say to the officer?
2. How does the officer respond to him?
3. Why does Iona drive his cab erratically? Is he an inexperienced driver? Give your reasons for the answer.
4. Describe the people who hire the cab for the Police Bridge? What discussion takes place amongst them?
5. What comments do they make on the cabdriver?
6. How does Iona react to them?
7. Why does Iona communicate his grief to others? Does he succeed?
8. To whom does he ultimately relate the tale of his grief?

#### APPRECIATION

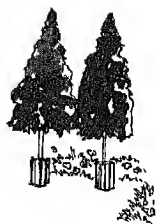
1. What is the theme of the story?
2. What roles do the officer and the quarrelling young men play in the story? Are their roles alike or do they differ in any way?
3. What is the significance of the title 'The Lament'?
4. What place does the horse occupy in the story?

#### DISCUSSION

1. What impression of people do you get from this story? Do you think this is a fair picture?
2. 'Animals are our friends.' Discuss.

---

## A Case of Identity



ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE (1859-1930), who was a medical practitioner, is known for his detective stories all over the world. His detective, Sherlock Holmes, and chronicler, Dr. Watson, have become household names. The collections of his short stories include—The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and The Return of Sherlock Holmes.

*Holmes stories are full of suspense, excitement and humour. At the same time they develop a structure of keen, analytical intelligence, with a deep human appeal.*

*The 'I' in the story refers to Dr Watson, the friend of Holmes and the supposed chronicler of the story.*

'My DEAR fellow,' said Sherlock Holmes as we sat on either side of the fire in his lodgings at Baker Street, 'life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent. We would not dare to conceive the things which are really mere commonplaces of existence. If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the 'plannings, the cross-purposes, the wonderful chain of events, working through generations, and leading to the most peculiar results, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and foreseen conclusions most stale and unprofitable.'

'And yet I am not convinced of it', I answered. 'The cases which come to light in the papers are, as a rule, bad enough, and vulgar enough. We have in our police reports realism pushed to its extreme limits and yet the result is, it must be confessed, neither fascinating nor artistic.'

'A certain selection and discretion must be used in producing a realistic effect,' remarked Holmes. 'This is wanting in the police report, where more stress is laid, perhaps, upon the platitudes of the magistrate than upon the details, which to an observer contain the vital essence of the whole matter. Depend upon it, there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace.'

I smiled and shook my head. 'I can quite understand your thinking so,' I said. 'Of course, in your position of unofficial adviser and helper to everybody who is absolutely puzzled, throughout three continents, you are brought in contact with all that is strange and bizarre. But here'—I picked up the morning paper from the ground—'let us put it to a practical test. Here is the first heading upon which I come. "A husband's cruelty to his wife." There is half a column of print, but I know without reading it that it is all perfectly familiar to me. There is, of course, the other woman, the drink, the push, the blow, the bruise, the sympathetic sister or landlady. The crudest of writers could invent nothing more crude.'

'Indeed your example is an unfortunate one for your argument' said Holmes, taking the paper and glancing his eye down it. 'This is the Dundas separation case, and as it happens, I was engaged in clearing up some small points in connection with it. The husband was a teetotaller, there was no other woman, and the conduct complained of was that he had drifted into the habit of winding up every meal by taking out his false teeth and hurling them at his wife, which, you will allow, is not an action likely to occur to the imagination of the average story-teller. Take a pinch of snuff, Doctor, and acknowledge that I have scored over you in your example.'

He held out his snuffbox of old gold, with a great amethyst in the centre of the lid. Its splendour was in such contrast to his homely ways and simple life that I could not help commenting upon it.

'Ah,' said he, 'I forgot that I had not seen you for some weeks. It is a little souvenir from the King of Bohemia in

return for my assistance in the case of the Irene Adler papers.'

'And the ring?' I asked glancing at a remarkable brilliant which sparkled upon his finger.

'It was from the reigning family of Holland, though the matter in which I served them was of such delicacy that I cannot confide it even to you, who have been good enough to chronicle one or two of my little problems.'

'And have you any on hand just now?' I asked with interest.

'Some ten or twelve, but none which present any feature of interest. They are important, you understand, without being interesting. Indeed, I have found that it is usually in unimportant matters that there is a field for the observation, and for the quick analysis of cause and effect which gives the charm to an investigation. The larger crimes are apt to be the simpler, for the bigger the crime the more obvious, as a rule, is the motive. In these cases, save for one rather intricate matter which has been referred to me from Marseilles, there is nothing which presents any features of interest. It is possible, however, that I may have something better before very many minutes are over, for this is one of my clients, or I am mistaken.'

He had risen from his chair and was standing between the parted blinds, gazing down into the dull neutral-tinted London street. Looking over his shoulder, I saw that on the pavement opposite there stood a large woman with a heavy fur boa round her neck, and a large curling red feather in a broad-brimmed hat which was tilted in a coquettish Duchess of Devonshire fashion over her ear. From under this great panoply she peeped up in a nervous, hesitating fashion at our windows, while her body oscillated backward and forward and her fingers fidgeted with her glove buttons. Suddenly, with a plunge, as of a swimmer who leaves the bank, she hurried across the road, and we heard the sharp clang of the bell.

'I have seen those symptoms before,' said Holmes, throwing his cigarette into the fire. 'Oscillation upon the

pavement always means an *affaire de coeur*. She would like advice, but is not sure that the matter is not too delicate for communication. And yet even here we may discriminate. When a woman has been seriously wronged by a man she no longer oscillates, and the usual symptom is a broken bell wire. Here we may take it that there is a love matter, but that the maiden is not so much angry as perplexed, or grieved. But here she comes in person to resolve our doubts.'

As he spoke there was a tap at the door, and the boy in buttons entered to announce Miss Mary Sutherland, while the lady herself loomed behind his small black figure like a full-sailed merchant-man behind a tiny pilot boat. Sherlock Holmes welcomed her with the easy courtesy for which he was remarkable, and, having closed the door and bowed her into an armchair, he looked her over in a minute and yet abstracted fashion which was peculiar to him.

'Do you not find,' he said, 'that with your short sight it is a little trying to do so much typewriting?'

'I did at first,' she answered, 'but now I know where the letters are without looking.' Then, suddenly realizing the full purport of his words, she gave a violent start and looked up, with fear and astonishment upon his broad-humoured face. 'You've heard about me, Mr. Holmes,' she cried, 'else how could you know all that?'

'Never mind,' said Holmes, laughing, 'it is my business to know things. Perhaps I have trained myself to see what others overlook. If not, why should you come to consult me?'

'I came to you, sir, because I heard of you from Mrs. Etherege, whose husband you found so easy when the police and everyone had given him up for dead. Oh, Mr. Holmes, I wish you would do as much for me. I'm not rich, but still I have a hundred a year in my own right, besides the little that I make by the machine, and I would give it all to know what has become of Mr. Hosmer Angel.'

'Why did you come away to consult me in such a hurry?' asked Sherlock Holmes, with his fingertips together and his eyes to the ceiling.

Again a startled look came over the somewhat vacuous face of Miss Mary Sutherland. 'Yes, I did bang out of the house' she said, 'for it made me angry to see the easy way in which Mr. Windibank—that is my father—took it all. He would not go to the police, and he would not go to you, and so at last, as he would do nothing and kept on saying there was no harm done, it made me mad, and I just put on my things and came right away to you.'

'Your father,' said Holmes, 'Your stepfather, surely, since the name is different.'

'Yes, my stepfather. I call him father, though it sounds funny, too, for he is only five years and two months older than myself.'

'And your mother is alive?'

'Oh, yes, mother is alive and well. I wasn't best pleased, Mr. Holmes, when she married again so soon after father's death, and a man nearly fifteen years younger than herself. Father was a plumber in the Tottenham Court Road, and he left a tidy business behind him, which mother carried on with Mr. Hardy, the foreman; but when Mr. Windibank came he made her sell the business, for he was very superior, being a traveller in wines. They got £ 4700 for the goodwill and interest, which wasn't near as much as father could have got if he had been alive.'

I had expected to see Sherlock Holmes impatient under this rambling and inconsequential narrative, but, on the contrary, he had listened with the greatest concentration of attention.

'Your own little income.' He asked, 'does it come out of the business?'

'Oh, no, sir. It is quite separate and was left me by my uncle Ned in Auckland. It is in New Zealand stock, paying 4½ per cent. Two thousand five hundred pounds was the amount, but I can only touch interest.'

'You interest me extremely,' said Holmes. 'And since you draw so large a sum as a hundred a year, with what you earn into the bargain, you no doubt travel a little and indulge yourself in very way. I believe that a single lady can get on very nicely upon an income of about £ 60.'

'I could do with much less than that, Mr. Holmes, but you understand that as long as I live at home I don't wish to be a burden to them, and so they have the use of the money just while I am staying with them. Of course, that is only just for the time. Mr. Windibank draws my interest every quarter and pays it over to mother, and I find that I can do pretty well with what I earn at typewriting. It brings me two pence a sheet, and I can often do from fifteen to twenty sheets a day.'



'You have made your position very clear to me,' said Holmes. 'This is my friend, Dr Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Kindly tell us now all about your connection with Mr. Hosmer Angel.'

A flush stole over Miss Sutherland's face, and she picked nervously at the fringe of her jacket. 'I met him first at the gasfitter's ball,' she said. 'They used to send father tickets when he was alive, and then afterwards they remembered us, and sent them to mother. Mr. Windibank did not wish us to go. He never did wish us to go anywhere. He would get quite mad if I wanted so much as to join a Sunday-school treat. But this time I was set on going, and I would go; for what right had he to prevent? He said the fold were not fit for us to know, when all father's friends were to be there. And he said that I had nothing fit to wear, when I had my purple plush that I had never so much as taken out of the drawer. At last, when nothing else would do, he went off to France upon the business of the firm, but we went, mother and I, with Mr. Hardy, who used to be our foreman, and it was there I met Mr. Hosmer Angel.'

'I suppose,' said Holmes, 'that when Mr. Windibank came back from France he was very annoyed at your having gone to the ball.'

'Oh, well, he was very good about it. He laughed, I remember, and shrugged his shoulders, and said there was no use denying anything to a woman, for she would have her way.'

'I see. Then at the gasfitters' ball you met, as I understand, a gentleman called Mr. Hosmer Angel.'

'Yes, sir. I met him that night, and he called next day to ask if we had got home all safe, and after that we met him—that is to say, Mr. Holmes, I met him, twice for walks, but after that father came back again, and Mr. Hosmer Angel could not come to the house any more.'

'No?'

'Well, you know, father didn't like anything of the sort. He wouldn't have any visitor if he could help it, and he

used to say that a woman should be happy in her own family circle. But then, as I used to say to mother, a woman wants her own circle to begin with, and I had not got mine yet.'

'But how about Mr. Hosmer Angel? Did he make no attempt to see you?'

'Well, father was going off to France again in a week, and Hosmer wrote and said that it would be safer and better not to see each other until he had gone. We could write in the meantime, and he used to write everyday. I took the letters in the morning, so there was no need for father to know.'

'Were you engaged to the gentleman at this time?'

'Oh, yes, Mr. Holmes. We were engaged after the first walk that we took. Hosmer—Mr. Angel—was a cashier in an office in Leadenhall Street—and—'

'What office?'

'That' the worst of it, Mr. Holmes, I don't know.'

'Where did he live, then?'

'He slept on the premises.'

'And you don't know his address?'

'No - except that it was Leadenhall Street.'

'Where did you address your letters, then?'

'To the Leadenhall Street post office, to be left till called for. He said that if they were sent to the office he would be chafed by all the other clerks about having letters from a lady, so I offered to typewrite them, like he did his, but he wouldn't have that, for he said that when I wrote them they seemed to come from me, but when they were typewritten he always felt that the machine had come between us. That will just show you how fond he was of me. Mr. Holmes, and the little things that he would think of.'

'It was most suggestive,' said Holmes. 'It has long been an axiom of mine that little things are infinitely the most important. Can you remember any other little things about Mr. Hosmer Angel?'

'He was a very shy man, Mr. Holmes. He would rather walk with me in the evening than in the daylight, for he said that he hated to be conspicuous. Very retiring and gentlemanly he was. Even his voice was gentle. He'd had the quinsy and swollen glands when he was young, he told me, and it had left him with a weak throat, and a hesitating, whispering fashion of speech. He was always well dressed, very neat and plain, but his eyes were weak, just as mine are, and he wore tinted glasses against the glare.'

'Well, and what happened when Mr. Windibank, your stepfather, returned to France?'

'Mr. Hosmer Angel came to the house again and proposed that we should marry before father came back. He was in dreadful earnest and made me swear, with my hands on the Testament, that whatever happened I would always be true to him. Mother said he was quite right to make me swear, and that it was a sign of his passion. Mother was all in his favour from the first and was even fonder of him than I was. Then, when they talked of marrying within the week, I began to ask about father; but they both said never to mind about father, but just to tell him afterwards, and mother said she would make it all right with him. I didn't quite like that, Mr. Holmes. It seemed funny that I should ask his leave, as he was only a few years older than me; I didn't want to do anything on the sly, so I wrote to father at Bordeaux, where the company has its French offices, but the letter came back to me on the very morning of the wedding.'

'It missed him, then?'

'Yes, sir; for he had started for England just before it arrived!'

'Ha! That was unfortunate. Your wedding was arranged, then, for the Friday. Was it to be in church?'

'Yes, sir, but very quietly. It was to be at St. Saviour's, near King's Cross, and we were to have breakfast afterwards at the St. Pancreas Hotel. Hosmer came for us in a hansom, but as there were two of us he put us both

into it and stepped himself into a four-wheeler, which happened to be the only other cab in the street. We got to the church first, and when the four-wheeler drove up we waited for him to step out, but he never did, and when the cabman got down from the box and looked there was no one there! The cabman said that he could not imagine what had become of him, for he had seen him get in with his own eyes. That was last Friday, Mr. Holmes, and I have never seen or heard anything since then to throw any light upon what became of him.'

'It seems to me that you have been very shamefully treated,' said Holmes.

'Oh, no, sir! He was too good and kind to leave me so. Why, all the morning he was saying to me that, whatever happened, I was to be true; and that even if something quite unforeseen occurred to separate us, I was always to remember that I was pledged to him and that he would claim his pledge sooner or later. It seemed strange talk for a wedding-morning, but what has happened since gives a meaning to it.'

'Most certainly it does. Your own opinion is, then, that some unforeseen catastrophe has occurred to him?'

'Yes, sir. I believe that he foresaw some danger; or else he would not have talked so. And then I think that what he foresaw happened.'

'But you have no notion as to what it could have been?'

'None.'

'One more question. How did your mother take the matter?'

'She was angry, and said that I was never to speak of the matter again.'

'And your father? Did you tell him?'

'Yes, and he seemed to think, with me, that something had happened and that I should hear of Hosmer again. As he said, what interest could anyone have in bringing me to the door of the church, and then leaving me? Now, if he had borrowed my money, or if he had married me and got

my money settled on him, there might be some reason, but Hosmer was very independent about money and never would look at a shilling of mine. And yet, what could have happened? And why could he not write? Oh, it drives me half mad to think of it, and I can't sleep a wink at night.' She pulled a little handkerchief out of a muff and began to sob heavily into it.

'I shall glance into the case for you,' said Holmes, rising, and I have no doubt that we shall reach some definite result. Let the weight of the matter rest upon me now, and do not let your mind dwell upon it further. Above all, try to let Mr. Hosmer Angel vanish from memory, as he has done from your life.'

'Then you don't think I'll see him again?'

'I fear not.'

'Then what has happened to him?'

'You will leave that question in my hands. I should like an accurate description of him and any letters of his which you can spare.'

'I advertised for him in last Saturday's Chronicle,' said she. 'Here is the slip and here are four letters from him.'

'Thank you. And your address?'

'No. 31 Lyon Place, Camberwell.'

'Mr. Angel's address you never had, I understand. Where is your father's place of business?'

'He travels for Westhouse & Markbank, the great claret importers of Frenchchurch Street.'

'Thank you. You have made your statement very clearly. You will leave the papers here, and remember the advice which I have given you. Let the whole incident be a sealed book, and do not allow it to affect your life.'

'You are very kind, Mr. Holmes, but I cannot do that. I shall be true to Hosmer. He shall find me ready when he comes back.'

For all the preposterous hat and the vacuous face, there was something noble in the simple faith of our visitor which compelled our respect. She laid her little bundle of

papers upon the table and went her way, with a promise to come again whenever she might be summoned.

Sherlock Holmes sat silent for a few minutes with his fingertips still pressed together, his legs stretched out in front of him, and his gaze directed upward to the ceiling. Then he took down from the rack the old and oily clay pipe, which was to him as a counsellor and, having lit it, he leaned back in his chair, with the thick blue cloud-wreaths spinning up from him, and a look of infinite languor on his face.

'Quite an interesting study, that maiden,' he observed. 'I found her more interesting than her little problem, which by the way, is rather a trite one. You will find parallel cases, if you consult my index, in Andover in 77, and there was something of the sort at The Hague last year. Old as is the idea, however, there were one or two details which were new to me. But the maiden herself was most instructive.'

'You appeared to read a good deal upon her which was quite invisible to me,' I remarked.

'Not visible but unnoticed, Watson. You did not know where to look, and so you missed all that was important. I can never bring you to realize the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of thumbnail, or the great issues that may hang from a bootlace. Now, what did you gather from that woman's appearance? Describe it.'

'Well, she had a slate-coloured, broad-brimmed straw hat, with a feather of a brackish red. Her jacket was black, with black beads sewn upon it, and a fringe of little black jet ornaments. Her dress was brown, rather darker than coffee colour, with a little purple plush at the neck and sleeves. Her gloves were grayish and were worn through at the right forefinger. Her boots I didn't observe. She had small round, hanging gold earrings, and a general air of being fairly well-to-do in a vulgar, comfortable, easy going way.'

Sherlock Holmes clapped his hands softly and chuckled.

'Upon my word, Watson, you are coming along wonderfully. You have really done very well indeed. It is true that you have missed everything of importance, but you have hit upon the method, and you have a quick eye for colour. Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details. My first glance is always at a woman's sleeve. In a man it is perhaps better first to take the knee of the trousers. As you observe, this woman had plush upon her sleeves, which is a most useful material for showing traces. The double line a little above the wrist, where the typewritist presses against the table, was beautifully defined. The sewing machine of the hand type, leaves a similar mark, but only on the left arm, and on the side of it farthest from the thumb, instead of being right across the broadest part, as this was. I then glanced at her face, and, observing the part, as this was. I then glanced at her face, and, observing the dint of a pince-nez at either side of her nose, I ventured a remark upon short sight and typewriting, which seemed to surprise her.'

'It surprised me.'

'But, surely it was obvious. I was then much surprised and interested on glancing down to observe that, though the boots which she was searing were not unlike each other, they were really odd ones; the one having slightly decorated toe-cap, and the other a plain one. One was buttoned only in the two lower buttons out of five, and the other at the first, third, and fifth. Now, when you see that a young lady, otherwise neatly dressed, has come away from home with odd boots, half-buttoned, it is no great deduction to say that she came away in a hurry.'

'And what else?' I asked, keenly interested, as I always was, by my friend's incisive reasoning.

"I noted, in passing, that she had written a note before leaving home but after being fully dressed. You observed that her right glove was torn at the forefinger, but you did not apparently see that both glove and finger were stained with violet ink. She had written in a hurry and dipped her pen too deep. It must have been this morning, or the mark

would not remain clear upon the finger. All this is amusing, though rather elementary, but I must go back to business, Watson. Would you mind reading me the advertised description of Mr. Hosmer Angel?"

I held the little printed slip to the light.

Missing (it said) on the morning of the fourteenth, a gentleman named Hosmer Angel. About five feet seven inches in height; strongly built, sallow complexion, black hair, a little bald in the centre, bushy, black side-whiskers and moustache; tinted glasses, slight infirmity of speech. Was dressed, when last seen, in black frock-coat laced with silk, black waistcoat, gold Albert chain, and grey Harris tweed trousers, with brown gaiters over elasticized boots. Known to have been employed in an office in Leadenhall Street. Anybody bringing—

'That will do,' said Holmes. 'As to the letters,' he continued glancing over them, 'they are very commonplace. Absolutely no clue in them to Mr. Angel, save that he quotes Balzac once. There is one remarkable point, however, which will no doubt strike you.'

'They are typewritten,' I remarked.

'Not only that, but the signature is typewritten. Look at the neat 'Hosmer Angel' at the bottom. There is a date, you see, but no superscription except Leadenhall Street, which is rather vague. The point about the signature is very suggestive—in fact, we may call it conclusive.'

'Of what?'

'My dear fellow, is it possible you do not see how strongly it bears upon the case?'

'I cannot say that I do unless it were that he wished to be able to deny his signature if an action for breach of promise were instituted.'

'No, that was not the point. However, I shall write two letters, which should settle the matter. One is to a firm in the City, the other is to the young lady's stepfather, Mr. Windibank, asking him whether he could meet us here at six O'clock tomorrow evening. It is just as well that we

should do business with the male relatives. And now, Doctor, we can do nothing until the answers to those letters come, so we may put our little problem upon the shelf for the interim.'

I had had so many reasons to believe in my friend's subtle powers of reasoning and extraordinary energy in action that I felt that he must have some solid grounds for the assured and easy demeanour with which he treated the singular mystery which he had been called upon to fathom. Once only had I known him to fail, in the case of the King of Bohemia and of the Irene Adler photograph; but when I looked back to the weird business of 'The Sign of Four,' and the extraordinary circumstances connected with 'A Study in Scarlet,' I felt that it would be a strange tangle indeed which he could not unravel.

I left him then, still puffing at his black clay pipe, with the conviction that when I came again on the next evening I would find that he held in his hands all the clues which would lead up to the identity of the disappearing bridegroom of Miss Mary Sutherland.

A professional case of great gravity was engaging my own attention at the time, and the whole of next day I was busy at the bedside of the sufferer. It was not until close upon six O'clock that I found myself free and was able to spring into a hansom and drive to Baker Street, half afraid that I might be too late to assist at the denouement of the little mystery. I found Sherlock Holmes alone, however, half asleep, with his long, thin form curled up in the recesses of his armchair. A formidable array of bottles and test-tubes, with the pungent cleanly smell of hydrochloric acid, told me that he had spent his day in the chemical work which was so dear to him.

'Well, have you solved it? I asked as I entered.

'Yes. It was the bisulphate of baryta.'

'No, no, the mystery!' I cried.

'Oh that! I thought of the salt that I have been working upon.'

There was never any mystery in the matter, though, I said yesterday, some of the details are of interest. The only drawback is that there is no law, I fear, that can touch the scoundrel.'

'Who was he, and what was his object in deserting Miss Sutherland?'

The question was hardly out of my mouth and Holmes had not yet opened his lips to reply, when we heard a heavy footfall in the passage and a tap at the door.

'This is the girl's stepfather, Mr. James Windibank,' said Holmes. 'He has written to me to say that he would be here at six. Come in!'

The man who entered was a sturdy, middle-sized fellow some thirty years of age, clean-shaven, and sallow-skinned, with a bland, insinuating manner, and a pair of wonderfully sharp and penetrating gray eyes. He shot a questioning glance at each of us, placed his shiny top-hat upon the sideboard, and with a slight bow sidled down into the nearest chair.

'Good-evening, Mr. James Windibank,' said Holmes. 'I think that this typewritten letter is from you, in which you made an appointment with me for six O'clock?'

'Yes, sir. I am afraid that I am a little late, but I am not quite my own master, you know. I am sorry that Miss Sutherland has troubled you about this little matter, for I think it is far better not to wash linen of the sort in public. It was quite against my wishes that she came, but she's a very excitable, impulsive girl, as you may have noticed, and she's not easily controlled when she has made up her mind on a point. Of course, I did not mind you so much, as you are not connected with the official police, but it is not pleasant to have a family misfortune like this noised abroad. Besides, it is a useless expense, for how could you possibly find this Hosmer Angel?'

'On the contrary,' said Holmes quietly, 'I have every reason to believe that I will succeed in discovering Mr. Hosmer Angel.'

Mr. Windibank gave a violent start and dropped his gloves. 'I am delighted to hear it,' he said.

'It is a curious thing,' remarked Holmes, 'that a typewriter has really quite as much individuality as a man's handwriting. Unless they are quite new, no two of them write exactly alike. Some letters get more worn than others and some wear only on one side. Now you remark in this note of yours, Mr. Windibank, that in every case there is some little slurring over of the 'e', a slight defect in the tail of the 'r'! There are fourteen other characteristics, but those are the more obvious.'

'We do all our correspondence with this machine at the office, and no doubt it is a little worn,' our visitor answered, glancing keenly at Holmes with his bright little eyes.

'And now I will show you what is really a very interesting study, Mr. Windibank,' Holmes continued. 'I think of writing another little monograph one of these days on the typewriter and its relation to crime. It is a subject to which I have devoted some little attention. I have here four letters which purport to come from the missing man. They are all typewritten. In each case, not only are the 'e's' slurred and the 'r's' tailless, but you will observe, if you care to use my magnifying lens, that the fourteen other characteristics to which I have alluded are there as well.'

Mr. Windibank sprang out of his chair and picked up his hat. 'I cannot waste time over this sort of fantastic talk, Mr. Holmes,' he said. 'If you can catch the man, catch him, and let me know when you have done it.'

'Certainly,' said Holmes, stepping over and turning the key in the door. 'I let you know, then, that I have caught him!'

'What! Where?' shouted Mr. Windibank, turning white to his lips and glancing about him like a rat in a trap.

'Oh, it won't do—really it won't,' said Holmes suavely. 'There is no possible getting out of it, Mr. Windibank. It is quite too transparent, and it was a very bad compliment

when you said that it was impossible for me to solve so simple a question. That's right! Sit down and let us talk it over.'

Our visitor collapsed into a chair, with a ghastly face and a glitter of moisture on his brow. 'It'—it's not actionable,' he stammered.

'I am very much afraid that it is not. But between ourselves, Windibank it was as cruel and selfish and heartless a trick in a petty way as ever came before me. Now, let me just run over the course of events, and you will contradict me if I go wrong.'

The man sat huddled up in his chair, with his head sunk upon his breast, like one who is utterly crushed. Holmes stuck his feet up on the corner of the mantelpiece, and leaning back with his hands in his pockets, began talking rather to himself, as it seemed, than to us.

'The man married a woman very much older than himself, for her money,' said he, 'and he enjoyed the use of the money of the daughter as long as she lived with them. It was a considerable sum for people in their position, and the loss of it would have made a serious difference. It was worth an effort to preserve it. The daughter was of a good, amiable disposition, but affectionate and warmhearted in her ways, so that it was evident that with her fair personal advantages, and her little income, she would not be allowed to remain single long. Now her marriage would mean, of course, the loss of a hundred a year, so what does her stepfather do to prevent it? He takes the obvious course of keeping her at home and forbidding her to seek the company of people of her own age. But soon he found that that would not answer forever. She became restive, insisted upon her rights, and finally announced her positive intention of going to a certain ball. What does her clever stepfather do then? He conceives an idea more creditable to his head than to his heart. With the connivance and assistance of his wife he disguised himself, covered those keen eyes with tinted glasses, masked the face with a moustache and a pair of bushy

whiskers, sunk that clear voice into an insinuating whisper, and doubly secure on account of the girl's short sight, he appears as Mr. Hosmer Angel, and keeps off other lovers by making love himself.'

'It was only a joke at first,' groaned our visitor. 'We never thought that she would have been so carried away.'

'Very likely not. However that may be, the young lady was very decidedly carried away, and, having quite made up her mind that her stepfather was in France, the suspicion of treachery never for an instant entered her mind. She was flattered by the gentleman's attentions, and the effect was increased by the loudly expressed admiration of her mother. Then Mr. Angel began to call, for it was obvious that the matter should be pushed as far as it would go if a real effect were to be produced. There were meetings, and an engagement, which would finally secure the girl's affection from turning towards anyone else. But the deception could not be kept up forever. These pretended journeys to France were rather cumbrous. The thing to do was clearly to bring the business to an end in such a dramatic manner that it would leave a permanent impression upon the young lady's mind and prevent her from looking upon any other suitor for some time to come. Hence those vows of fidelity exacted upon a Testament, and hence also the allusions to a possibility of something happening on the very morning of the wedding. James Windibank wished Miss Sutherland to be so bound to Hosmer Angel, and so uncertain as to his fate, that for ten years to come, at any rate, she would not listen to another man. As far as the church door he brought her, and then, as he could go no further, he conveniently vanishes away by the old trick of stepping in at one door of a four-wheeler and out at the other. I think that that was the chain of events, Mr. Windibank!'

Our visitor had recovered something of his assurance while Holmes had been talking, and he rose from his chair now with a cold sneer upon his pale face.

'It may be so, or it may not, Mr. Holmes,' said he, 'but if you are so very sharp you ought to be sharp enough to

know that it is you who are breaking the law now, and not me. I have done nothing actionable from the first, but as long as you keep that door locked you lay yourself open to an action for assault and illegal constraint.'

'The law cannot, as you say, touch you,' said Holmes, unlocking and throwing open the door 'yet there never was a man who deserved punishment more. If the young lady has a brother or a friend, he ought to lay a whip across your shoulders. By Jove!' he continued, flushing up at the sight of the bitter sneer upon the man's face, 'It is not part of my duties to my client, but here's a hunting crop handy, and I think I shall just treat myself to—' He took two swift steps to the whip, but before he could grasp it there was a wild clatter of steps upon the stairs, the heavy hall door banged, and from the window we could see Mr. James Windibank running at the top of his speed down the road.

'There's a cold-blooded scoundrel!' said Holmes, laughing, as he threw himself down into his chair once more. 'That fellow will rise from crime to crime until he does something very bad, and ends on a gallows. The case has, in some respects, been not entirely devoid of interest.'

'I cannot now entirely see all the steps of your reasoning,' I remarked.

'Well, of course it was obvious from the first that this Mr. Hosmer Angel must have some strong object for his curious conduct, and it was equally clear that the only man who really profited by the incident, as far we could see, was the stepfather. Then the fact that the two men were never together, but that the one always appeared when the other was away, was suggestive. So were the tinted spectacles and the curious voice, which both hinted at a disguise, as did the bushy whiskers. My suspicions were all confirmed by his peculiar action in typewriting his signature, which, of course, inferred that his handwriting was so familiar to her that she would recognise even the smallest sample of it. You see all these isolated facts, together with many minor ones, all pointed in the same direction.'

'And how did you verify them?'

'Having once spotted my man, it was easy to get corroboration. I knew the firm for which this man worked. Having taken the printed description, I eliminated everything from it which could be the result of a disguise—the whiskers, the glasses, the voice, and I sent it to the firm, with a request that they would inform me whether it answered to the description of any of their travellers. I had already noticed the peculiarities of the typewriter and I wrote to the man himself at his business address, asking him if he would come here. As I expected, his reply was typewritten and revealed the same trivial but characteristic defects. The same post brought me a letter from Westhouse & Marbank, of Fenchurch Street, to say that the description allied in every respect with that of their employee, James Windibank.'

'And Miss Sutherland?'

'If I tell her she will not believe me. You may remember the old Persian saying. "There is danger for him who taketh the tiger cub and danger also for him who snatches a delusion from a woman." There is as much sense in Hafiz as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world.'

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

**GLOSSARY**

**Baker Street** — the street in London where Sherlock Holmes lived

**platitude** — a trite, dull or obvious remark

**Marseilles** — a town in France

**boa** — a long snake-shaped garment made of feathers, worn by women about the neck

**coquettish** — flirtatious

**panoply** — a splendid collection of things

**affaire de coeur** (Fr.) — a love affair

**abstracted** — inattentive

**vacuous** — showing or suggesting lack of thought or intelligence

**chafed** — teased

**muff** — a roll of fur or other warm material into which one puts on hands to keep them warm in cold weather.

**preposterous** — absurd

**languor** — tiredness of mind or body

**pince-nez** — a pair of spectacles with a spring that fits on the nose

**incisive** — clear and precise

**Balzac** — Honore de Balzac (1799-1850), a French novelist

**denouement** — the last part, especially of a book, play, etc. in which everything is settled or made clear

**suavely** — in a confident, smooth and elegant manner

**hunting crop** — a short riding whip, consisting of a short fold of leather fastened to a handle

**Hafiz** — pen name of Shamsuddin Muhammad (c. 1300-1388), a Persian poet

**Horace** — Roman poet and satirist, who lived in the first century B.C.

#### COMPREHENSION

1. What had Holmes and Dr Watson been discussing before the lady arrived? Does this discussion have any bearing on this story?
2. Why did Mary Sutherland come to see Holmes?
3. Who was Mr. Windibank? How was he related to this lady?
4. Where did the lady meet Mr. Hosmer Angel? Relate the incidents that paved the way for the arrangement of their marriage.
5. Describe the circumstances in which Mr. Angel disappeared. What was the lady's reaction to his sudden disappearance?
6. How did her mother and father react to this event? Why was she dissatisfied with their response?
7. How did Holmes solve this mystery? What was his finding?
8. Why did Holmes think that there was no point in telling the truth to Miss Sutherland?

#### APPRECIATION

1. 'Life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent'. How does the story prove this?

2. 'There is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace'. What do you understand by this statement?
3. What role does Miss Sutherland's mother play in the story? What does this reveal about her character?
4. What impression of Windibank do you form on the basis of the story?
5. 'There is danger for him who taketh the tiger cub and danger also for him who snatches a delusion from a woman'. Explain.

**Discussion**

1. 'The typewriter and its relation to crime'. Discuss what Sherlock Holmes would have written in his booklet on this.
2. A detective's profession is as exciting as it is dangerous. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.





## An Old Man Speaks

*SILABHADRA'S real name is Rebati Mohan Datta Choudhury. He is a distinguished writer of short stories and novels in Assamese. He has portrayed the recent Assamese society with a realistic touch. Delving deep into the psyche of his characters, he excels in depicting the life of common people, their needs, ambitions and frustrations. He received Sahitya Academy Award for his short stories Madhupur Bahudur in 1994.*

LEISURE. UNENDING leisure I have nothing to do. Nobody wants me to do anything and I don't want anybody to do anything for me. I go out seldom. Sitting comfortably on my favourite easy chair I feel relaxed. I direct my gaze across the road in front, beyond the field to the distant horizon. People come and go by the road, the farmers plough the field, the earth meets the sky in the horizon. I see. I see without looking. I feel tired of rest. I find some work. Just for the fun of it. Sometimes, I rummage through the old papers without knowing the outcome of my investigation. I do not expect any. Addresses of people, phone numbers and receipts of all kinds. Once these must have been very important and therefore were preserved with so much care. Now I cannot even remember the man whose address has been kept so carefully. Mr. Sailendra Nath Chakravarty, 14 Ballygunje Circular Road, Calcutta. Who is he? Who is the Saliendra Chakravarty? Why have I preserved his address with so much care? Here is another. Of course I know her. The address of my uncle's daughter. She was in Canada then. A useless piece of paper. It has outlived its necessity. She is no longer in Canada. Her husband is employed in a renowned Bombay firm. Or is he still there?

Here is the Bombay address of my student Jaya Nag. She invited us to her place in Bombay. She had a very spacious house. We would have no difficulty. Is she still in Bombay? I wonder. Is she still at her old address after twenty years? No. I have no intention of going to Bombay even if she is there. What is the importance of this piece of paper?

What a connoisseur of pieces of paper I have been all through my life! Multi-coloured and of various sizes. Nothing has any importance now. A heap of garbage. Some have been preserved so carefully that it is impossible to find them now. An important piece of paper might have been kept inside a book or in a special envelope. How important it was! I cannot trace it now. Why should I? But it must be there somewhere. Of what use is the valuable information? I don't need it now. It no longer has any importance. Nothing retains its importance forever. Everything outlives its utility.

The other day I found a letter written to me by my youngest brother when I was a student of Cotton College. He had asked me to take a pair of shoes for him when I was to go home during the summer vacation. On the backside of the letter he had traced carefully the outline of one of his feet and to avoid confusion, he had written his name in bold letters inside the contour of his foot. What is the importance of the letter today? What purpose will it serve? There is no longer any necessity of shoes fitting this measurement. We all have outlived our original measurements. Nobody fits in his old shape. We all have changed. It happens every day, every moment, slowly but surely. Do I have the emotions of my youth? Try as I might, I cannot recapture the sentiments of my yester years.

An old man differs fundamentally from a young man. A man never remains the same. He cannot, even if he so desires. He lives and changes simultaneously, always leaving a part of him behind. Where have I read that the cells of a human body are completely replaced after every seven years?

The cells of my body are tired. My mental agility is not what it used to be. At times I cannot even remember the

name of a man who is very close to me. I can visualise vividly the appearance of the man, his dress, the special way in which he talks, the particular way in which he smiles but cannot recall his name. It is a great strain for me as I try to remember his name. What could it be? What is the initial letter of his name? Amal, Ajit, Apurba? No, none of these? His name does not start with A. Does it start with B? Bijoy, Biren, Binod...? No, it does not start with B. All my attempts to remember his name fail. I feel uncomfortable. So long as I cannot attach the correct name to the man the man remains suspended in the air. It is rather embarrassing for both of us.

I have nothing to do. An oppressive burden of unlimited leisure. As I sit idle various thoughts pass through my mind. I fretted throughout my life. To what purpose? By the time I constructed my house and settled everything I realised with a shock that I was hardly far away from my grave.

What was the use of all those hectic efforts? After the death of my wife, the realisation has been more acute. Nothing more to do, nothing more to achieve. I am just waiting on the platform all alone, waiting for the last train.

My elder son resides in America with his wife and children. My younger son is supposed to be a journalist. I do not know exactly what he does. I do not even know where he lives. He is in Delhi today, in Bombay tomorrow. In fact, I no longer feel the necessity to know what he does. Earlier I was worried about his activities. Now I do not think about these matters. Everybody lives his own life. Nobody lives the life of another man as his representative. My elder son frequently writes to me to visit America once. I do not doubt the sincerity of his invitation. The hesitation is in my own mind. What does it matter if a useless thing lies here or in America? It amounts to the same thing. I very well realise I am no longer of any use to my sons. At best a fleeting memory and at worst an oppressive tradition.

As I sit idle, various thoughts pass through my mind. At first I tried to take stock of what I had done and achieved

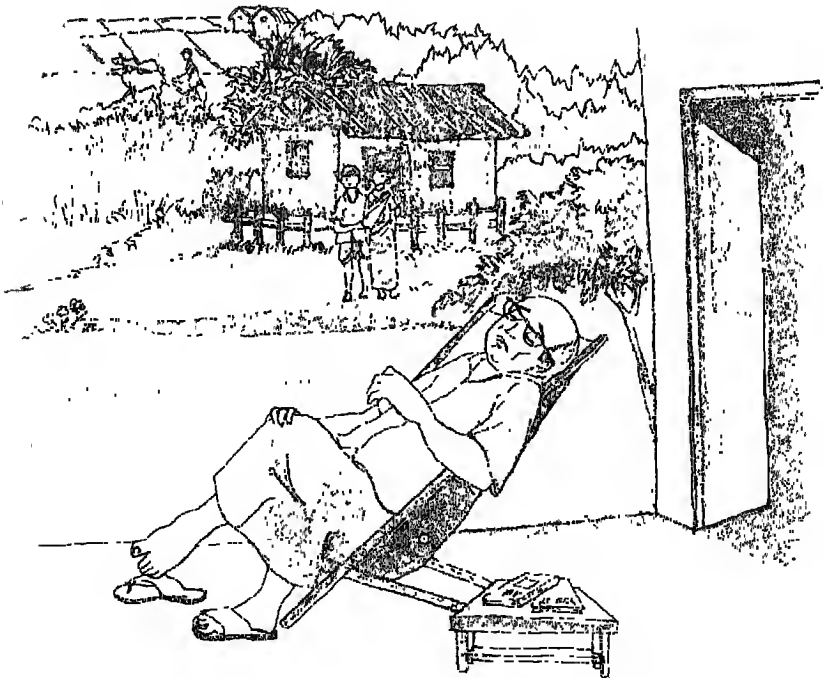
in my life. The balance sheet never agreed—what I wanted to do and what I did. But now the attempt seems to be futile. A man ceases to exist after his death. Not the faintest trace of him remains. Today no trace of my father exists except a faded photograph. Even with conscious effort I cannot bring his memory to my mind. I cannot feel his presence anywhere in my neighbourhood. I cannot remember anything of my grandfather. I saw him indeed. But how was he? This is what they are to me. Who else would remember them?

Even the great figures of the past have been condemned to live artificially in the worm-eaten pages of history books. They ceased to exist from the day they breathed their last. The meaning of living is not becoming a smutty figure in the pages of a text book. It is not becoming a disfigured statue in a neglected park. Perhaps it is more comprehensive. Can we presume that the mummies preserved in the pyramids of Egypt are living? Can anybody live in our memory? How is my memory? In fact, a man dies the moment he ceases to be useful to others and when nobody really needs him.

I was a teacher. Some of my students possibly understood what I taught and said. I was a successful teacher. Others could not follow me and naturally asserted that I was a hopeless teacher. Some of my colleagues liked me, some did not. I wrote a number of short stories. Those who liked me praised my stories. Many others called them trash. After all, how many people actually read those stories. So this too is of no importance. How many of us do really read and enjoy the works of the classical authors, students of literature and scholars excluded? How many young men of today read the plays of Bernard Shaw? I feel embarrassed when someone refers to me as a writer without ever having read anything I wrote. I really do feel uncomfortable.

I have done, I submit, nothing worthy of name and fame. I am at the end of an ordinary life waiting for an equally ordinary end. And that ends everything for me.

Jagabandhu Babu comes to my place frequently and we have discussions on all subjects. At times I am horrified to see the vast amount of bitterness that has accumulated in his mind throughout the long years of his life. He is a sane and sober man in all other respects but he has completely lost his clarity of vision in one respect. I feel perplexed when I try to measure the agony of a man who carries so much bitterness in his mind. He has a firm conviction that nobody wants him, that everybody just ignores him. He feels like an uninvited guest in his own house. Otherwise a very sane and sober man, he hardly talks about personal matters. We generally talk about cabbages and kings. But he could not control himself on that day. While talking on quite a different topic he suddenly remarked, "You see, Choudhury, a man should not live after he retires."



A very dangerous proposition. There will be a lot of death and destruction if we submit to his views. I simply smiled and did not ask him anything. He might have said something in a moment of weakness for which he would feel embarrassed later. Jagabandhu Babu said. "At the time of the *annaprasana* ceremony of my grandchild, Sachin asked me: 'Father, what do you suggest? How should we perform the ceremony?' I said: 'It is up to you what type of a party you throw and whom you invite. I have just one suggestion to make. Arrange to call our family priest from the village. Let him perform the auspicious rites for the first issue.'"

I sat silently without uttering a word. Jagabandhu Babu remained silent for a few moments and then expressed his bitterness. "You see, he never called the family priest. I did not say anything. After the ceremony was over Sachin himself said: 'I did not call the family priest. He is such an old man. It would have been troublesome for him as well as for us. He could not have come by the bus. It was difficult to send my car to escort him as the car was required here. Also, with the price of petrol as it is, it would have cost us a fortune to send the car.'"

I said, "Yes, he is right."

Jagabandhu Babu got excited.

"You do not understand. They spent a few thousand rupees to feed people. How much would it have cost to send the car? I did not say anything. You see, Choudhury, I was really pained by the indifference shown by Sachin."

I tried to console him. "Now, now. You should not mind. Sachin has not done this intentionally. He is too young to realise the importance of calling the family priest. He took the matter lightly and certainly would have sent the car had it been convenient."

Jagabandhu Babu said with a sigh, "I desired it so much. I really desired that the auspicious rites of my first grandchild be performed by our family priest."

I tried to put the matter in perspective: "Now, then. You should not take it to heart. They did not realise that

you placed so much importance on this particular aspect of the ceremony."

I smiled in spite of myself. Jagabandhu Babu asked me with a dour expression, "I do not find anything funny in the situation."

I said, "People speak of the generation gap. I think there is some truth in it. It is true that we move in two different planes. We really do not understand one another. The outlook and the taste of the new generation have undergone a vast change. I remember, while he was with me, my younger son used to turn on the radio full volume to listen to Hindi film songs. Those must have been songs but I have doubts about it. Lots of sound and fury and what else. One day he turned off the radio as soon as the song *Sho ja Rajkumari* of Saigal came on the air. I asked him: "Tune the radio please. Let me listen to the song."

It is a fact. Our outlook and taste differ from those of the young people. I suddenly realized the truth that day. When we were young we heard our father singing a few bars of a Bengali song in a theatrical way. We used to laugh behind his back. Our children possibly laugh behind our backs when they see our antics. Why possibly? They must certainly laugh as they observe our peculiar behaviour.

Jagabandhu Babu makes adverse criticism of the young boys and girls of the present era. I do not like to quarrel with him by contradicting his views. But if we try to judge a man by his outward appearance, his dress and his gestures, there is every possibility that we may make serious mistakes. I believe that there are as many nice youths today as there were many nice people earlier. I do not believe that only the young men of the present era are scoundrels. The main thing is how you look at it. In my childhood I heard that someone used to belabour his own mother in league with his wife. I did not believe the story at that time and I do not believe it even now. It is beyond my imagination that anybody can perform such a heinous crime.

What was I talking about? The young boys and girls of today. No, I am not one of those who prefer generalizations. How can I say they are all bad? They are what they are, of their kind as we were of ours.

I went to Biresh's house yesterday in the morning. He has come from America for a few days. He lives near the place where my son resides. Biresh's marriage was solemnised a few days back. He will return to America with his wife. When I went to his place Biresh was not present in the house. His wife received me. She is a first class M.Sc. in chemistry. She is neither oversmart nor shy. A very nice-looking lovely girl.

I was charmed by her conversation with me. She expressed her intentions of continuing further studies in America. She insisted that I should take a cup of tea. The fan in the drawing room was out of order. While I was drinking tea, she brought a palm-leaf-fan and started to fan me. I asked her not to bother but I liked the gesture very much. How can I speak ill of such a girl though she belongs to the present age?

After the death of my wife, I live all alone. Yes, I feel lonely. At times extremely lonely. She had a great longing for travels. But I had neither the money nor the leisure to go for travels. The main obstacle was money. Once I managed to take her to Delhi. With Delhi as the centre we visited Chandigarh, Amritsar, Hardwar, Agra and other neighbouring places. Once we went to Srinagar also. She enjoyed those journeys immensely. She had a great desire to visit Puri. We started for Puri too. There was a railway strike when we were in Calcutta. We returned by plane from Calcutta. She died before the journey to Puri could be undertaken.

Sometimes I cannot sleep at night. Old memories rush into my mind while I lie awake in my bed. I have nothing to do except recapitulate the incidents of bygone days. These are my only insidious companions.

I have constructed my house at a place ten miles away from the city. Many people have secured land in my

neighbourhood but only a few persons have constructed their houses. There are few men of my age in the neighbourhood. A young man lives with his wife in the house adjacent to mine. A young man with a great amount of self-confidence. He is busy with his own affairs. Quite natural. He addresses me as Mr. Choudhury. I was a bit annoyed on the first day by his mode of address. But afterwards I laughed heartily. How would he address me? Granddad or reverend uncle, or sir? After all, he is a very nice boy. A perfect gentleman. Right now I cannot remember the name of the boy.

Rains, incessant rain. There was not a moment of respite. Where was there such an inexhaustible supply of water?

"Who is there?"

I become alert with a start. Who could come in this weather, at the dead of night? A sense of fear pervaded my mind. I live practically alone in the house. The boy who is my helping hand cannot be roused from his sleep even if his bed was on fire. The barking of my dog confirmed my suspicion that somebody had actually entered in my compound. I shouted from my bed, "Who is there?"

"It is me, Satyen."

I immediately realised that Satyen was the young man who was my immediate neighbour.

He had not come rushing to my place with any definite idea of seeking my help. Not exactly that. He was at his wits end with horror. According to his calculation his wife was to deliver a child after about a month. At about ten at night she had a slight pain. Now she was in agony.

Satyen tried to explain his anxiety.

"I was thinking of leaving her at her mother's place within a day or two. What am I to do now? There is slight bleeding too."

Satyen was no longer showing any trace of his usual self-confidence. He looked haggard with fear and anxiety.

My car is as old as I am. Even when I was stronger I felt uncomfortable to drive the car at night. And it was raining so hard. But what else could I do?

"Let us drive her to the hospital."

"Are you....? Will you.....? Really.....?"

I realized that though he did not have complete confidence in my ability, he wanted with all his heart that I would be able to drive the car and take his wife to the hospital.

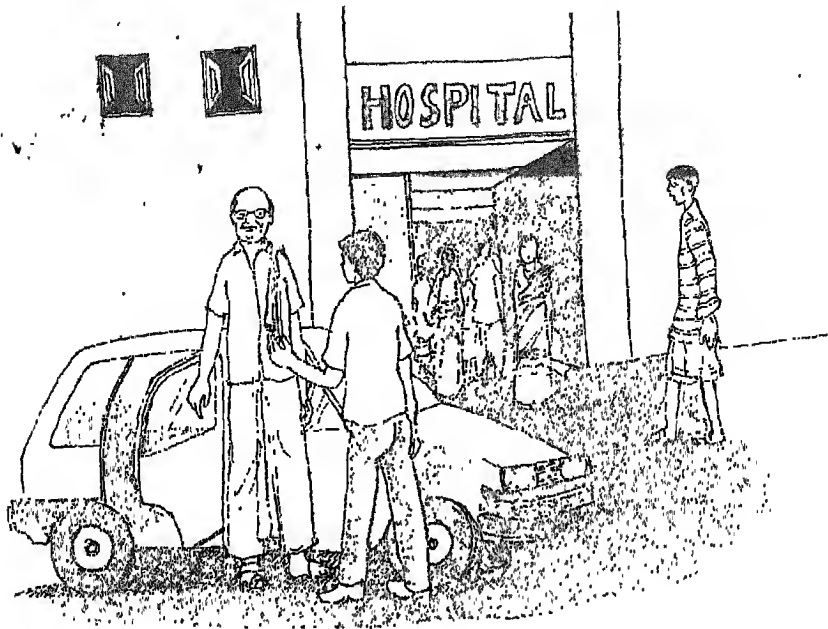
I do not invoke the name of God frequently. I prayed to God with all my heart. Should I fail? Oh God! I could not, I must not. If I could not carry Satyen's wife to the hospital in time then it would be proved without any doubt that I was living on borrowed time. I was continuing as an imposter. I was determined to accept the challenge.

It was raining incessantly. The wipers of the car were not working properly. I could not see the road clearly and was driving entirely on my intuition. A truck was coming from the opposite direction. The diffused light of the onrushing vehicle completely blinded my vision. I could not determine whether I was on the left, right or the middle of the road. I just switched off the light of my car and waited for the truck to crash against it or pass by it. The truck just passed by my car with a terrific speed and a cascade of water.

Satyen's wife groaned in pain from the back seat of the car. The strain was too much for me. I had a strong desire not to start the car again and wait for the end of the night. With a desperate attempt I threw away my weakness. With supreme effort I continued to move. My old car never put me in trouble. Once I came at night in this car from Nowgong. The tie rod end came off only when the car was just in front of the garage.

While driving, I realised that my old car would not fail me this time either. I proceeded with full confidence.

Here was the hospital. This was the emergency ward. Satyen became busy making necessary arrangements. Quite natural. I came out with my car. I felt weak and



dizzy. There was a continuous howling of wind alongwith the rain. I realised I was not equal to the task of making the return journey in this weather. But what was the necessity of making the return journey? I had finished the job which I was to do. I parked the car by the side of the road outside the compound of the hospital. I raised the glass panes and tried to relax in the back seat.

I was very tired but a sense of exhilaration pervaded my mind. I did it. Oh, what a sense of relief. After what a long time....

I did not know when I fell asleep. When I woke up the rain had stopped. The sky was clear. The rays of the rising sun were flooding the inside of the car. I came out of the car and straightened my limbs. I relieved myself standing by the side of the road. What about Satyen's wife? It would be better if I knew how she had fared. Of course, this was not an item included in the list of my duties. My

responsibility ended as soon as I brought her to the hospital. I did that. After many long years a pleasant sense of well-being arose in my mind. I felt I was still living. A sense of achievement in being able to perform an important job filled my mind with a pleasant glow.

"Uncle, were you here for the whole night? I am so sorry."

Satyen had completely forgotten about my existence but he became embarrassed to see me there, in such a position.

"Stop bothering about me. First, give me the information."

"All is well. A boy has been born to her. Both are well. Now let us go home. Let me go with you. I shall come back again in the afternoon."

"What do you mean? Let us go? Where are the sweets? You are a father now. You cannot be let off so lightly."

I forgot that I was an old man.

SILABHADRA

#### GLOSSARY

**rummage** — search unsystematically and untidily

**connoisseur** — an expert judge in matters of taste

**agility** — ability to move quickly and easily

**smutty** — smeared or blurred

**dour** — relentlessly severe, stern

#### COMPREHENSION

1. What is so ironical about preserving some papers? Give two examples, as enumerated in the first two paragraphs.
2. How unlimited leisure has become a source of oppressive burden to the author?
3. Why is the author reluctant to visit his son who is in America?
4. Why did the author feel embarrassed when somebody referred to him as a writer without reading any of his books?

5. Why did Jagabandhu Babu feel bitter about the fact that his son did not call the family priest to conduct a ceremony?
6. Why did the author appreciate the behaviour of Biresh's wife?
7. Why did the author accept the challenge of driving the car in the midst of a wild rainy night?
8. Why did the author feel happy after reaching the hospital safely?
9. Why did the author forget that he was an old man?

#### **APPRECIATION**

1. How did the author's skepticism turn into one of his beliefs?
2. "Nobody fits in his old shape. We all have changed". Explain in your own words.
3. At times, you see a familiar face, but you are unable to recollect the name. How do you react to such a situation? Do you feel embarrassed?
4. "I am just waiting on the platform all alone, waiting for the last train". What do you make of this sentence?

#### **Discussion**

1. Do you think old people or grand-parents are useful?
2. It is not always possible for a very old person to find meaning in life. Discuss.
3. Do you think generation gap exists? Will it be there between your generation and the next?





## After Bhopal

HARSH MANDER is a social activist, writer and civil servant. He has worked in Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh for almost two decades. He is closely associated with social causes and movements. At present he is Country Director of the development support organisation, Action Aid India.

*The present story is taken from his collection Unheard Voices. His stories reinforce our faith in the dignity of human struggle.*

THE LARGE family was all curled together under quilts when, around midnight, they suddenly woke up with a terrible choking feeling. Neighbours banged on the door shouting, 'gas has leaked from the factory! Run! Run!'

It was the night of 2 December 1984.

Sunil had not wanted to go to bed that night. His bag and uniform were ready for school the following morning. It was Sunday, and he had played all day long with his seven brothers and sisters. Pushpa, his eldest sister, recently married, had returned only a few weeks earlier to her parents' home in Bhopal to celebrate Diwali and he longed to spend more time with her. Their father was a carpenter, respected for his skills in making furniture, and he earned over a hundred rupees a day. Although it was a large family, Sunil never recalls a day when he went to bed hungry. They lived in a small mud and wood shanty in a slum called J.P. Nagar. The government had awarded all slum-dwellers tenurial rights for the land on which their homes stood only months earlier.

Outside it was pitch dark, and even the electric lights were shrouded by a dense, deadly fog of poison gas that

engulfed the shanty town. J.P. Nagar was a slum that had been settled haphazardly just adjacent to the Union Carbide Corporation pesticide factory in Bhopal. Unknown to its residents, what had happened that night was that during routine maintenance operations, a large quantity of water had entered one of the storage tanks of the factory, through leaking valves and corroded pipes, triggering a runaway chemical reaction, resulting in the discharge of forty tonnes of lethal gas on a sleeping city of a million unsuspecting people.

One of the first localities into which the gas spewed was J.P. Nagar, where Sunil and his family were sleeping. Now roused, they found themselves gasping for breath, their eyes burning as if they were on fire. Coughing and screaming, they ran out of their homes, and found themselves swept by a human torrent surging ahead to safety.

Sunil, then eleven years old, tightly held the hand of his younger sister Mamata as he ran desperately. Lost in the dense clouds of gas from the plant, he had got separated from the rest of his family. Suddenly, he badly needed to urinate. He had stopped for barely a moment to do this when even Mamata's hand was wrenched out of his. Screaming people surged from all sides, some fell and were crushed, others tore off their clothes, yet others were vomiting uncontrollably. The stench of urine and shit was overpowering. All around people were collapsing, unconscious or dead.

Sunil ran past the Chhola cremation ground, gasping for his life, his eyes afire, until near a plywood mill he could make out the phantom form of a matador van. The van driver was bundling his family into the van, and Sunil also pushed his way inside. He does not recall how the van-driver manoeuvred his way through the desperate crowds, out of the city, and drove non-stop all the way to the village of Budhni. There was panic in the village that the gas would reach that far, and the van-driver drove on up to the neighbouring town of Hoshangabad. It was close

to dawn, on the morning of 3 December 1984, when they reached Hoshangabad. The van-driver left Sunil by a roadside tea stall. Sunil lay down there on the road exhausted, unseeing, and in desperate pain. The local people and policemen picked him up and took him to the district hospital.

There he lay for the next four or five days, his pain slowly becoming more bearable as he was nursed and treated by the hospital staff. But all the while, he was seized by a deep foreboding about what had become of his family. The local administration flashed details about him on the radio. Meanwhile, Sunil's relatives from Lucknow who had heard about the gas tragedy rushed to Bhopal to search for their family members. The radio announcement about Sunil led them to the district hospital in Hoshangabad.

Sunil felt a rush of both relief and panic when he saw his relatives, his mother's brother and sister Pushpa's husband. He asked how the rest of his family was. At that point they hid the terrible truth from him. When he was discharged from the hospital, Sunil's relatives took him



back home to J.P. Nagar. It was like returning to a graveyard. There was loud weeping all around. Relief volunteers were distributing milk and food. Slowly, his relatives broke their silence on the immense tragedy that had befallen them. His mother had died holding her eight-month-old infant son, Sanjay, who miraculously had survived. The relatives had identified her body in the Hamidia police station, and had retrieved the baby. Neighbours reported that their father had returned to the their hut the next morning. On the night of the gas leak, their father had locked the hut before they ran. When he opened the door on his return the next morning, he found the dead body of one of his sons, Santosh, who accidentally had been left behind in the panic. Shortly after, their father died, maybe of the gas, maybe of a broken heart, and the neighbours had cremated him.

Of his seven brothers and sisters, only the baby Sanjay, and Mamata, whose hand had been wrenched from his in the crowd, were saved. The bodies of the others in the family were identified from the posters put up in the police stations, carrying photographs of the people who had been cremated on the mass funeral pyres or buried in mass graves.

Sunil suddenly found himself almost completely alone in the world. All of eleven years, he was now responsible for looking after his eight-month-old brother, and his sister who was three years younger than him. Meanwhile, the rumours swept the stunned and devastated city that while cleaning out the gas from the factory, there was danger that gas would leak once again. The chief minister attempted to counter these rumours with the launch of what he described as Operation Hope. As part of this exercise tall screens were erected around the factory and sprayed by helicopters under the gaze of TV cameras. But the survivors of Bhopal refused to be reassured or assuaged, and a second exodus began from the city in the same month. People sold their belongings, and even their homesteads, for a pittance, as they fled to safer places.

Sunil's relatives persuaded him to move to Lucknow with his brother and sister. They sold all the belongings of the family in Bhopal, except their home in J.P. Nagar, and moved there.

But within six months, young Sunil returned to Bhopal. His relatives used his sister Mamata as a servant in their home. Sunil resolved to bring up his younger sister and infant brother, without help from his larger family.

Help did come, mainly from his neighbours in J.P. Nagar. They fed the children, and took turns to look after the baby. But it was a sombre world to grow up in. In his lane alone, twenty-five people had died. Sounds of weeping were heard from different corners at unexpected hours of the day and night, and a dense mood of grief and despair settled there. Survival in the shanty town was threatened, because those who had inhaled the gas could no longer do physical labour to earn a living, as they had in the past.

In the early years, however, the survivors lived on relief. The efforts of government to rebuild livelihoods of the survivors ended as sad and expensive failures. The Madhya Pradesh government over fifteen years spent 700 million rupees for reconstructing livelihoods, built 152 work sheds, trained about 6,500 people, yet created some kind of on-going livelihoods for little more than eighty women.

Sunil decided not to go back to school, but instead to devote himself entirely to his brother and sister. He recalls with gratitude a young man of J.P. colony, Mohammed Ali, who took him under his care, and went with him to various government offices to help him secure his compensation. Initially, for each dead person, the next of kin were given Rs10,000. There were seven dead in Sunil's family, so he received with Mohammad Ali's help a total of Rs. 70,000. Of these, Rs.10,000 went to his sister's husband in Lucknow. The rest of the money was placed in fixed bank deposit. Sunil received Rs 580 per month as interest, and on this he brought up his family.

A couple of years passed, and a junior official from the women and child development department of the state

government visited Sunil's home, and persuaded him to admit the children in a hostel at Indore. It had been hard for him as a young boy to bring up an infant and a little girl, so Sunil agreed. He went with his brother and sister in a government jeep to Indore, and left them at the hostel. But, Sunil found it painful to return to an empty home.

Meanwhile, unknown to Sunil and other residents of J.P. Nagar, as they struggled for livelihoods and ways to stem their failing health, a curious legal battle was being fought on their behalf in the courts of India and USA. The Indian government through the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Processing of Claims) Act in March 1985 arrogated to itself, sole powers to represent the victims in the civil litigation against Union Carbide. On behalf of the victims the Indian government filed a suit for compensation of more than 3 billion US dollars in the Federal Court of the Southern District of New York.

In the search for a star witness in New York courts, government officials settled for Sunil, because he was a child who had lost his parents and five brothers and sisters in the tragedy. Government officials, including a senior officer of the district, visited him in his hutment to persuade him to be part of a government team which would travel by aeroplane to New York to give evidence. Sunil's neighbours clamoured that he should not agree to go to New York. They reasoned with him—once you get on to an aeroplane, who knows whether you would even return home alive.

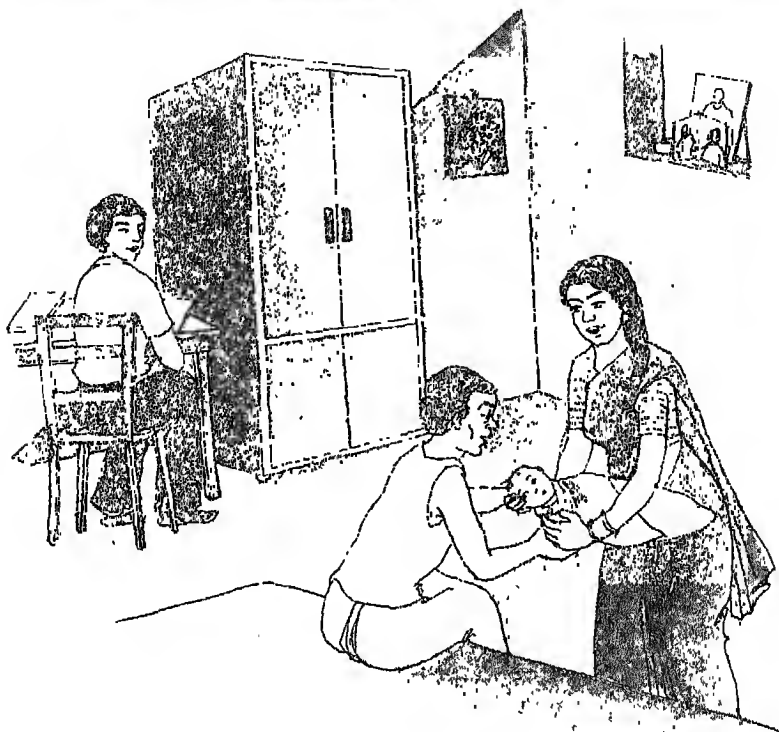
Sunil was frightened, but also excited and in the end agreed to fly out to the United States with the Indian team. Government officials accompanied him on the aeroplane to New York. Sunil recalls feeling afraid that his neighbours' warnings would turn out to be true.

At the New York airport, the delegation was received by the Indian ambassador. It was cold. Someone gave Sunil a windcheater. They were put up in a luxurious hotel, and because of jetlag, Sunil spent a lot of his time sleeping during the day, and lay awake, tossing about nervously at night. One evening the ambassador invited the delegation

home for a party. Drinks were served, followed by an elaborate dinner.

In court, Sunil told his story fluently in Hindi, and his testimony was translated for the judge. He learnt later that the case was returned in May 1986 to the Indian courts on grounds of 'forum non-convenience', under the condition that Union Carbide would submit to their jurisdiction. During the proceedings at the Bhopal district court, Union Carbide was directed to pay an interim relief sum of Rs 3,500 million so that the delay in the adjudication of the case did not adversely affect the claimants.

However, Union Carbide refused to pay interim relief and its appeal against this decision reached the Indian Supreme Court. On 14 February 1989, in a sudden departure from the matter of interim relief, the Supreme Court passed an order approving the settlement that had been reached between the Government of India and Union Carbide, without the knowledge of the claimants of Bhopal. According to the terms of the settlement, in exchange of payment of 470 million US dollars, the Corporation was to be absolved of all liabilities, criminal cases against the company and its officials were to be dropped, and the Indian government was to defend the Corporation in the event of future suits. The settlement sum, nearly one-seventh of the damages initially claimed by the government, while being far below international standards was, in fact, even lower than the modest standards set by the Indian Railways for railway accidents. There were widespread protests by the Bhopal victims against the betrayal by the government and many organisations and individuals including prominent members of the parliament supported the call to oppose the infamous settlement. Several petitions seeking review of the order on settlement were filed and the Supreme Court announced its revised judgement on 3 October 1991. The final judgement upheld the settlement amount paid by the Carbide but directed the Indian government to make good any shortfall during the distribution of compensation. Also the criminal cases



against the Corporation and its officials were reinstated in the final judgement. The Supreme Court also directed Union Carbide to finance a 500-bed hospital for the medical care of the victims.

After receiving so much attention from the Indian government authorities during the court case, Sunil found himself forgotten after he returned to India. The SOS Villages of India established a settlement in Bhopal, and his brother and sister were transferred there. Sunil was permitted to meet them once a month, and he greatly looked forward to these visits. These were moments of light amidst his loneliness.

It was once again Sunil's older friend, Mohammad Ali, who assisted him to secure his full claims from the maze of the Bhopal settlement courts. Mohammad Ali, who worked in a cloth mill, would take time off from work to accompany Sunil whenever he had a date with the courts.

But, over time, it became increasingly difficult for Sunil to return to his empty house. It was too full of memories. His brother and sister were growing up in the SOS Village. Activists working with gas relief had constituted a group called Children Against Carbide. Sunil recalls his time with this group, both for the excitement he experienced while organising protest rallies, as well as for the companionship it offered him. In time, in 1991, he moved in to stay with a leading activist Sathyu. A year later, in 1992, the state government built a 'widows' colony'. Houses were allotted by lottery to widows and orphans who had survived the Bhopal gas tragedy, and Sunil qualified. He then moved into this colony, where he lives until today.

Sunil finally was awarded a compensation of seven hundred thousand rupees. One hundred thousand he invested in purchasing a mini-bus, the remaining he put in a bank to secure the future of his brother and sister. The mini-bus brought him four to five thousand rupees a month for six months. Then one day, the driver and conductor were caught smuggling opium in the bus. The police seized it.

By now, Sunil had reached manhood. Many people sought to befriend him, because after receiving his compensation, he had become a man of uncommon means. He began drinking, and the habit increasingly took hold of him. Perhaps, it filled a certain emptiness that lay within him.

One day, some friends persuaded him to join an organisation in Bhopal. You have a good strong body, they told him. Why don't you do something. He spent a year with the organisation, and it brought him the company of many young men. But Sunil recalls that there was not much to do there and he was just whiling away time. In the end he decided to part ways with the organisation.

In 1994, his sister turned eighteen, beyond the protection offered by the SOS Village in Bhopal. Sunil decided to get both his sister and brother discharged from

the SOS Village, and they moved in with him, in the widows' colony.

Their presence filled a little bit the accumulated loneliness that festered inside his soul all these years. But perhaps they returned too late. A member of the same organisation which he was earlier associated with, continued to meet him, encouraging him to drink, and pressurising him to spend the large sums of compensation money which lay in the bank in his name. But he was adamant that he would not withdraw this money, which he saw as a trust for the future of his brother and sister. His relationship with the member of the organisation soured and they spread ugly and shameful rumours about Sunil's character.

As time passed, Sunil became more and more withdrawn and uncommunicative. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, he found something slowly cracking up within him. He was frequently depressed, and became obsessed by thoughts of suicide. He heard voices call out to him. He would not stir out of his home, would not wash himself or talk to people. The neighbours took care of his brother and sister, and fed Sunil. As his condition worsened, they contacted his friend of the past, Sathyu, who once again took him into his home and had him treated. There were times when he ran out of the house without clothes, feverishly roaming the streets night and day, running for kilometres on the railway track into the forest.

For the four years prior to the writing of this piece, Sunil has been on medication for his mental illness. He moved back to his home in the widows' colony with his brother and sister. He lives and supports his family on the interest earned by the compensation money in the bank. He continues to refuse to touch the principal; he is uncompromising that this is for when they grow up. He refuses also to consider marriage for himself. He must first ensure a good future for those he had taken fifteen years earlier under his care.

Two years ago, he got his sister Mamata married. His relatives in Lucknow found a suitable boy for her there; an electrician by trade. His brother studies in an English-medium school, Sunil says with pride, and he gets good marks. I want to be an engineer, the brother says shyly. He has come a long way from the infant in his mother's arms, on the winter night of 1984 that changed their lives forever.

Sunil's eyes look glazed, without expression, empty of emotion and warmth, as he speaks sparingly. But during our meeting, there was one time when they lit up, and he smiled. This was when he spoke to us of his sister Mamata's visit home last year for Holi. She had brought home her first-born child. What a beautiful child he is, Sunil said. So fair, and with eyes shaped like a *kairee*, a young mango, he added with pride and tenderness.

And in this way, life does go on.

**HARSH MANDER**

#### **GLOSSARY**

- assuaged** — made (an unpleasant feeling) less intense  
**exodus** — mass departure of people  
**somber** — gloomy  
**arrogated** — take or claim something without justification  
**adjudication** — a formal judgement or decision about a problem or disputed matter  
**festered** — became worse or more intense  
**imperceptibly** — impossible to perceive

#### **COMPREHENSION**

1. How did the people of J.P. Nagar react to the gas-leak, and what happened to them?
2. How did Sunil escape the gas-city?
3. What did Sunil find about his family?
4. What was the rumour and how did government try to counter this?
5. How did Sunil take care of his younger brother and sister in the early days?

6. How did Sunil become a witness before the New York Court?
7. What was the final judgement of the Supreme Court for the victims?

#### APPRECIATION

1. How did Sunil use the second compensation money?
2. What do you think went wrong with Sunil so that first he became a drunkard, then a recluse and last a mental patient?

#### DISCUSSION

1. Would you call the Bhopal Gas Tragedy a man-made or natural disaster? Give reasons for your answer.
2. What should be done to prevent such tragedies in future?

